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Moonlight Madness

by

EDITH NEPEAN

Author of
"A Bundle of Myrrh," "The Valley of Desire,"
"Gwyneth of the Welsh Hills," etc.

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To

KITTY NEPEAN WALSH

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MOONLIGHT MADNESS

CHAPTER I

MORVYDD

THE spell of Merlin the Magician still rests upon wild Wales, bewitching the fiery ridge of Crib Coch into a treasure-house of blood-red rubies, shrouding the pitiless heights of the Lliwedd in a mantle of royal purple, wooing the crystal cataract of Rhaidyr Cwm Dyli with rainbow kisses. . . . Beneath the sacred peak of the Wyddfa lies a kingdom of enchantment. Thrust aside the curtain of gauze—the soft mists that stretch before you—and your eyes are dazzled with the silver of a myriad lakes, or the gleam of twin turquoises nestling in a brilliant emerald. . . . Yawning precipices and fearsome crags, gloomy passes and swift flowing rivers, and away to the west the amorous bosom of the ocean gilded with the passion of the setting sun. . . .

Llanina lighthouse is set at the edge of a grey stone quay, a grim sentinel guarding the toilers of the sea. Footpaths and roadways have been cut by man into the precipitous cliffs that are washed by the waters of Llanina Bay. At night the low terraces of white-washed cottages are as pretty as the candle-lit toy-house of chalk, which delights the heart of a child.

In the shadow of the wide stone ledges on the quay, lovers steal caresses, and in the shelter of the lifeboat-house, men dawdle in groups, ghostly silhouettes, their

weather-beaten faces occasionally betrayed by the flame of a match as a pipe is re-lit.

A girl came along the steep roadway, and she was singing softly:

> "Come in, Robin, do not fear us,
> Thy bright eyes and chirping cheer us.
> Thy sad note excites our pity,
> Now the frost begins to bite thee. . . ."

She was seventeen. Her head was bare, and tendrils of hair curled around her forehead and her ears. A gay patterned shawl was drawn closely over her pink cotton dress. Upon her feet she wore a pair of clogs. A lad stepped away from the group of silhouettes near the boat-house and followed her. . . .

"Lisi fach, Lisi fach," he cried, "stop now, I will carry your basket of fish."

The song died away, and the girl paused before the sturdy youth. She knew every line of his bronzed face, that he wore an old blue reefer coat over his jersey, and sea boots half covered his shabby trousers.

"Have you been buying the place, Lisi? I have been waiting for an hour on the quay, and all that time you were in Morris's shop."

"I did not ask you to wait for me, Teivi Jones. If I spend all night in choosing a present for the baban, that's my business, not yours!"

"The baban," Teivi smiled. "What a surprise your mistress gave us. First of all, Llio the preacher going off to lecture in America, and then Miss Morvydd slipping away and coming back married with a baban and her husband . . .!"

"A fine man indeed, so says the mistress," Lisi answered quietly. "It was sad for her that he had to leave for foreign parts on business after their marriage. But when he comes back, he'll find his baby waiting for him . . the finest baban in old Wales."

"Pity Llio Elys is blind," sighed Teivi. "It is only natural that he would like to see his nephew."

"Well, indeed," Lisi retorted, "the master is so full of fun and so nimble on his feet I often forget that he is blind!"

Teivi was artful. He knew Lisi's weak spot. He had but to extol the virtues of her master, the bard of Llanina, or Morvydd, her mistress, to captivate the little maid's attention. Had she not been in the service of these good people since she was a small child, and now she was on the borderland of a vigorous womanhood? She was strong, capable, faithful as a Welsh terrier. Albeit for weeks a shadow had rested upon her soul. Her mistress was unhappy. What manner of sorrow had wrought the lines of suffering around the grey eyes, the hardness to the curving lips, the droop to the slim shoulders? Many times had Lisi caught the glint of tears in Morvydd's eyes when she was cooing her child to sleep against her breast. . . .

What manner of man was the mistress's husband? Once Lisi had come unexpectedly into Morvydd's bedroom, and she had seen a photograph in the other woman's hand.

"Oh, mistress," she had cried out, unable to curb her curiosity, "is that your husband? Well, indeed he's splendid."

Lisi broke off frightened, for Morvydd had turned upon her like a savage beast.

"How dare you spy upon me. Do you want me to send you away for ever?" And Lisi had fallen on her knees and clutched Morvydd's skirts crying bitterly:

"Before Jesus bach, I was not spying, little mistress, as true as I live. There is nothing I would not do for you."

"Then hold your tongue, and do your work . "

Lisi thought of this scene as Teivi walked by her side, and talked of the bard, and Morvydd his sister, and Gareth the child. . .

"It's a pretty spot in the moonlight for sure." Lisi pointed to a ruined tower in the distance. They had left the main road now and had taken a wooded path that led up to Carreg Ina.

"Yes, yes, it is pretty enough," Teivi agreed as he tried to put his arm around Lisi's waist. "But dark nights are best for lovers, eh, Lisi?"

"Well, where indeed are the lovers?" Lisi cried scornfully.

"You and me."

"You are too forward."

"I'd marry you to-morrow."

"Tut, tut, and live with your mother?"

"She is well stricken in years."

"I would mend, bake, and work for the pair of you—no thank you. Carreg Ina for me, tidy wages, and a day off a month!"

"I'll take you for a sail to Puffin Island on your next day off," he said eagerly, undaunted by Lisi's uncomplimentary words about his mother's home. "It would be champion to see the birds. The island is covered with their eggs. They look like snow upon the ground, and very good they are to eat, too, when they are cooked in the right way."

Lisi wavered as she was unlatching the gate.

"Well, indeed, I'd like to see the birds," she admitted.

Teivi's brown face wrinkled in a smile.

"You shall see them all right for certain. *Nos dawch.*" Lisi flushed when she felt his ardent kiss, and she sighed happily when she placed her hand upon the latch of the door and entered the house. On the threshold she paused: Morvydd's lullaby floated out into the night:

In the shelter of my heart, love,
At the gateway of my soul,
Sleep and rest, my little Gareth,
Mother's darling, mother's own.

Morvydd was kneeling beside the oak cradle, rocking it gently to and fro as she sang. She was about twenty-five; her dark hair was a veil of silk framing her pale face. Upon the table at her side there was a closely written letter. She turned her head towards the doorway at the sound of Lisi's clogs.

"The master will be home any day. He is a great saint, Lisi, without sin, the nearest approach to the Son of God that I have known. He is moved to anger when he speaks of sin."

"Not always, Miss Morvydd fach: I remember once when he preached about evildoers, and he said: 'Let he that be without sin cast the first stone,' and very comfortable indeed I went to bed that night."

A faint smile showed itself on Morvydd's troubled face.

"Yes, I remember the sermon, but I have also heard him speak harshly of the transgressor, and of the hardness of his lot. Dear me, Lisi, I talk too much. Put the supper things on the table.

The child was sleeping now, and Morvydd once again found herself studying her brother's letter:

> "I have not yet got over the surprise of the letter that told me of your marriage, and you never even mentioned the name of your husband. Pity that he has to spend so much time abroad. I have often tried to picture the type of man whom you would marry. Of course he is tall, fine, and manly and pure in heart like my little sister. . ."

Her head fell forward on her arms, and her slender body was convulsed with weeping. . . . Pure in heart! The words mocked her. With an impulsive movement she pushed the sheet of note-paper aside Earlier in the day she too had written a letter. . . .

Gareth was carried upstairs to Morvydd's room. Shortly after, Morvydd went into the kitchen. She wore a white dress that showed off the voluptuous line of her figure. She was beautiful, her cheeks were flushed.

"You are going out?" Lisi cried uneasily. "And why are you wearing that dress? There is no singing meeting or capel."

Morvydd smiled.

"It is a practice," she answered. "I wanted to see if I could still wear pretty clothes."

"But it looks——" Lisi halted, for she was half afraid of giving expression to her thoughts, and yet she hardly knew why.

"Well, what is it?" Morvydd asked, unusually gentle and patient in her manner.

"Like a wedding dress!"

"You think so?"

"Well, whatever do you put it on to-night for, mistress?"

"I will see if Maggie Vaughan is in. She is clever with her needle. It is perhaps a little tight in the sleeve. Lend me your shawl, Lisi, that I may wear it over my dress, and I shall not be noticed as I run down through the village."

Lisi's clogs clattered across the red-tiled kitchen. She took the shawl from the peg behind the door, and as she handed it to Morvydd, she said:

"Don't be cross now, little mistress, but there's glad I am to see you look so fine, and pleased the master will be. Dear me, I shan't sleep a wink to-night with excitement. All the congregation from Capel Nazareth are going to meet him to-morrow at the station. The choir will sing hymns on the quay afterwards. They are going to give the master a champion welcome home to old Wales."

"I'm glad, he'll be pleased. If I am late, and you are tired, lie on my bed and wait there until I get back.

Take care of Gareth for me." Morvydd wrapped the shawl around her, and she passed through the way of the door.

CHAPTER II

"UNTO HIM A SON"

To-night there were banks of stormy clouds that hid the moon. Morvydd did not go down into the village, but she turned to the left and passed along the road that ran across the heather-covered moors, in the opposite direction to Llanina. She walked rapidly for half an hour, and then she left the road and made her way over the moor, until she came to the ruins of a tower and some broken walls profusely overspread with ivy and sheltered with wide branching trees. An abrupt descent from these ruins led down to the beach and sands, and Morvydd stooped and pushed the branches of the trees aside. Within it was warm and sheltered. The ground was soft, dry, and mossy. Through a niche, that once had been a pointed window, she could look out upon the road from whence she had come. She could study the restless ocean, the distant mountains, and the moor. She sat down on a great stone, resting her chin in the cup of her hands, watching and listening for the sound of a horse's hoofs, waiting with a beating heart . . . a breaking heart.

Careless of the whiteness of her gown, she fell upon her knees, and, lifting her eyes to the starlit heavens above the ruins, she cried out despairingly: "Jesus bach . . . send him to me. . . ." She did not dare to look again through that niche in the ruined octagon tower. She was afraid of losing her faith in her frenzied appeal. She wanted to concentrate every nerve in her body to obtaining her heart's desire. If there was anything in prayer, she was willing to believe. If there was

anything in mental telepathy, she was prepared to exert her powers of concentration to the uttermost. Faintly borne upon the breeze there came the sound of a horse's hoofs.

She sprang up ; the horse had passed through the gap, the sound of the hoofs came nearer and nearer. The rider had dismounted, he parted the trees, tethered his horse.

" Hello, hello, are you there, Morvydd ? "

It was months since she heard the sound of his voice, that cultured musical voice. How madly she loved it, adored it, worshipped it. . . .

" Cariad, Cariad, Cariad, oh, thank God, you've come ! "

She drew his head down towards her, her fingers toying sensuously with his black hair.

He was tall and handsome, very attractive with his pale features, and eyes glowing with hidden fire. He was not thrilled with Morvydd's endearments, they did not move him to fold her in his arms, or to kiss the quivering lips held up to his. The pitiless truth dazed her. . . . She remembered other days when his passion burnt her, uplifted her, destroyed her. . .

" Cariad ! "

" I'm not in a mood for sentimental rot."

Gently he put her away from him.

" But you said you loved it, the Welsh name for sweetheart."

He ignored her remark.

" I came to-night because you threatened me. I told you before that when you threaten you harden me. A woman's threats leave me like winter ice on Snowdon."

" Dear heart, how can you talk to me like this ? "

" Why do you send for me, when months ago I told you the end had come ? "

" But I didn't believe you," her voice shook. " I couldn't believe that love could die. I knew you were worried, because you thought——"

" Never mind thoughts," he interrupted, " let us get

to facts, for I shall not see you again after to-night. As for your threats, do just as you like." He took a pipe out of his pocket, filled it, and lit it.

The callousness of his action drove her to frenzy, and she tore the pipe from his mouth and threw it on the ground.

There was a tense pause.

"Thank you very much for breaking one of my teeth. I see you are not in a mood to discuss anything, so I will say good-bye!"

Morvydd sprang after him, and she held him with superhuman strength, for she was a frail woman, a poor match for his virile manhood.

"I'm sorry I've made you angry. Be good to me," she laid her face against his, against his closed, merciless lips.

"Well, go over there, sit down, and I'll listen to you."

"Cariad!"

"Sit down, I don't want any more of your acting stunts," and he put his hand ruefully to his mouth, for his lip had been slightly cut when Morvydd robbed him of his pipe.

She sank down on to a stone.

"I dare not face Llio," she panted. "He is coming home to-morrow. I dare not lie to him; besides, it would be useless. Directly he touched me, heard my voice, he would know the truth . . . that I had deceived him. And Gareth . . . Gareth . . . he is wonderful. Do you never want to see your son?"

"The whole thing is intolerable," the man broke out impatiently. "I offered to make a handsome settlement on you. You refused it. I have made a settlement on the child."

"You care for me?" her agonised whisper reached him faintly.

"Have no delusions upon that."

"You mean"—her voice trembled—"your passion is dead for me?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh, God, and I trusted you. Look at me now, in my white dress."

"For heaven's sake, don't be theatrical," the man broke out impatiently.

"But Llio . . . he will know."

"Llio Elys is not a fool, he is a man. Perhaps America will have taught him what life means. You are not the first Welshwoman who has made a fool of herself over a man."

"I shall die," she said dully.

"Threats, threats, oh, yes, the same old threats," he exclaimed mockingly. "Anyway I'll be off." He went towards the opening in the ruin, and, unfastening the reins of his horse, he mounted and rode away.

When he reached the top of the moor, the moon had risen from the cloud in all her splendour. The tower, the cliffs, the sands, were bathed in silver.

"Of course, she won't do it," the man said, giving rein to his mare. "It's her way to threaten."

The next moment an exclamation broke from his lips. He saw Morvydd run wildly away from the ruin and disappear over the edge of the cliff. She tore madly along the shore. His throat grew dry.

"Morvydd . . . Morvydd," he shouted.

He galloped across the sands. But he could not reach her. Suddenly his horse could not move. The terrified animal whinnied and shook its mane. He saw Morvydd's white figure in the water, heard her cry, and then she vanished beneath the waves. Oh, God! Oh, God! The horse was now fast disappearing. He tried to dismount. In his frenzy he stumbled. And it seemed as if the earth opened. Quicksands, quicksands . . . cruel sands. . . . Where are fair Morvydd, her lover, and his horse?

. . . . . .

Lisi awoke with a start. It was daylight. She sat up in bed and rubbed her sleepy eyes. Gareth was safe, smiling in his baby dream. . . . But the mistress?

Lisi tumbled out of bed and she hastened into the kitchen. It was six by the old grandfather's clock. She went to the door; it was unlatched. She hurried into the parlour; the little mistress was not there. All over Carreg Ina searched the faithful Lisi.

Later there were strange sounds outside, low voices and shuffling feet. Lisi looked out into the garden, and some fishermen were carrying something fair and white in their arms up the garden path. Lisi became a pillar of stone. Someone put his arm around her and she heard Teivi's kind, broken voice:

"A terrible thing has happened. We found her. We were just getting into the boats when I saw something white on the rocks. The tide was coming in. . . ."

That night, Llio the preacher came home. He entered Morvydd's room alone, and locked the door. Lisi heard the sound of weeping, of prayer, and then followed a long silence.

After many hours he came forth. Llio's hair had been brown with silver threads, but now it was as white as the silken tuft that tips the rushes on Penmorva's Marsh. His sightless gaze was fixed on the girl with the little white bundle nestling so closely against her.

"Put the child in my arms." And when he felt the warmth of life against his heart, Lisi heard him whisper:

"Unto him a Son. . ."

CHAPTER III

"CONQUEROR OF HUMANITY"

Time is like a strong runner, swift but sure, relentless, victorious! Time is the great conqueror of humanity, a cruel taskmaster, a thief that robs us of our years, a generous friend that heals our wounds. But Love is the

one hurt that is too difficult for Time's healing balm. Time cannot cure whilst human emotions are warm. It is only when we can say : " I have plumbed the depths of despair, I have drained the cup of sorrow, there is no other cup that I may drink of joy or anguish, for now I am impervious to heat and cold. Human desire is dead in me."

The years sped along. At Carreg Ina, Morvydd's son took the surname of his famous uncle. He was known as Gareth Elys. He grew swiftly from babyhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to the frontier of manhood. Llio told him of his mother's beauty and of her entrancing voice. Gareth gazed wonderingly at her picture that hung upon the walls of Llio's room. Morvydd, Maid of the Sea, who lost her life one night, when she strolled too far across the treacherous sands that ran out to the west of the quay.

Llio carried his years lightly. He was tall and slight, clean-shaven with a fair skin that had a rosy tinge.

Teivi Jones still pursued the wayward Lisi. More than once he had threatened to marry another comely wench of Llanina, but the threat was not a success, inasmuch as Lisi had but given a toss of her head and told him to get on with his work.

" Well, now, indeed," she remonstrated time and again, " the mistress left the baban in my charge. I will not leave him until the good Jesus bach calls me to the Heavenly Throne."

One day Llio heard the story of wayward Lisi from the impatient Teivi's own lips :

" It is sad for me," he grumbled sorrowfully " For years I've dangled at her heels. My mother is in her grave. Persuade Lisi to take me for her husband. ' Marriage is good for man,' said St. Paul, ' it is not good for man to live alone.' "

Thus Llio became the intermediary between the lovers.

When Llio entered the kitchen, Lisi was spreading a clean cloth over a red earthenware pan-mug, in which

dough had been placed after vigorous kneading. Gareth was seated on the settle, shaping a boat out of a piece of wood. Llio turned towards his nephew, albeit he could not see the boy's black hair, his clear skin, his dark brown eyes, red curving lips, and graceful figure. . . . Gareth's father must have been a handsome man, whoever he was ! Many had told Llio of the boy's charm, and, looking up, Gareth caught the curious intensity of his uncle's expression. Llio's intuition frequently cheated the lad into the belief that he could see.

" Uncle bach," he cried, holding up the wood upon which he was using his knife, " this boat is *The Morvydd.* One day, I will set sail in her from Llanina quay. I will head for Australia, for there lives my father. I will seek him for sure, and bring him home in safety to Carreg Ina. It is Australia where my father lives, is it not ? "

For a moment Llio did not answer. How many times had Gareth asked that question since he was old enough to discover that he was not like other boys ? Of his mother he knew much ; of his father, nóthing !

It was Lisi and Teivi who solved the problem. They thought of a place as far away from Llanina as they could imagine.

" And where is my father ? " asked Gareth.

" Australia," was Lisi's pert answer. " That is true, is it not, Teivi bach ? "

" Well, yes indeed," Teivi told Gareth. " He went sailing from Llanina quay one night, and your mother went to see him off. She set out to walk home to Carreg Ina and the tide turned, and she found herself in the quicksands ! "

So many times had Llio heard the story, that even he at length was half inclined to believe it. But Lisi's and Teivi's invention made a strong and definite appeal to the boy. From the hour that he could reason with himself, he had decided that he would go to sea on a vessel bound for that vast continent wherein dwelt his father.

" I came to have a talk with you this morning, Lisi,"

said Llio, patting Gareth on the head. "Are you not fond of Teivi?"

Lisi turned a flushed face to her master.

"Oh, yes!"

"Then why not make him happy? I would be proud to officiate at the wedding of you two."

Lisi carefully placed the pan-mug before the fire for the dough to rise.

"What would the place be like without me," she asked, "and, even if you are sick of me about Carreg Ina, do you think I would desert Gareth?"

Llio placed his hand on the woman's shoulder.

"After the wedding, Lisi, your home and Teivi's home shall be at Carreg Ina."

"You mean that I shall not have to go away?"

"No, my girl. Bring your husband here. I can spare a couple of rooms. Tell Teivi to let his mother's cottage. He can attend to his boat just as well from here as from his old home."

And it came to pass that one bright morning, in the presence of a crowded congregation, Teivi and Lisi were made man and wife by Llio at Capel Nazareth. But Gareth wearied of the wedding ceremony. When the singing in the capel was almost tearing the slates from the roof with its ecstatic passion, the boy slipped out into the sunlit roadway. To his surprise, a strange girl, a few years younger than himself, came riding along the road on a pony.

"You had better hurry," cried Gareth, "the wedding is on now."

The girl drew up and stared at the boy. When she smiled her blue eyes lit up with mischievous light. Her face was round, her lips were the colour of wild cherries, her teeth like the pearl that one day Gareth had found in an oyster. Her hair was bronze, curly, and thick, a glittering veil of beauty blowing around her childish shoulders. She was dressed in a well-cut riding coat, with breeches and leggings. She was sixteen at most.

" I don't know anything about a wedding," she exclaimed. " I am Mervee Prichard of Llanina Priory. We have just come home from India. My father called at Carreg Ina to see the blind poet ; he is out, so I thought I would go for a little ride. Someone told my father that the Reverend Llio Elys is a great scholar. My father has no son, so I am to be taught all sorts of things. We are going to France to finish my education; afterwards we shall settle down at Llanina for ever and ever."

" Well, indeed, I am very glad," Gareth answered eagerly. " I like the way you are dressed. You won't mind climbing, and coming out with the boats ? "

" Rather not," cried the girl. " What is your name ? "

" Gareth Elys."

" You are a son of the poet ? "

" No, he is my uncle."

Then there was the sound of many voices, and the people filed out of Nazareth. Just as Gareth was going to say something to his new friend, he saw a tall, grey-haired man, riding down the hill. He had clean-cut features, dark skin, and he was wearing immaculate riding kit.

" Come along, Mervee," he called out, " we must get out of this rabble."

CHAPTER IV

" LITTLE SWEETHEART "

THE chance for Gareth to carry out his heart's desire and go off to Australia in search of his father came the next day !

Captain Dan Morris, master of a full-rigged sailing vessel in the Australian trade, called at Carreg Ina to see his distant cousin Llio. He became instantly attracted to his stalwart young nephew When they sat around the

table eating some of Lisi's well-buttered pancakes, Captain Dan, stirring his hot tea in one of the old-fashioned cups, that were only brought out of the corner cupboard to do honour to highly favoured guests, said :

" What are you going to do with the boy, Llio man ? "

" I should like him to go to college, Carmarthen or Bangor. I want him to become a preacher. I have taught him carefully, and for his age he promises well."

Dan Morris finished his tea, and filled his pipe ; he remarked cautiously :

" The boy will be all the better as a preacher if you make him a sailor first ; that is the best way of making him a fisher of men."

Gareth's dark eyes sparkled with excitement.

" Oh, take me with you, Captain Dan," he cried out impetuously. " Uncle Llio will tell you why I want to go to sea ! "

Captain Dan laughed. The boy's manly enthusiastic spirit pleased the old sea-dog. He placed his rough hand upon Llio's long tapering fingers.

" A few voyages round the Horn will make a man of the lad, and he'll see the world. It's a good way of getting to know the Book of Knowledge."

Llio became very still. A troubled expression momentarily shadowed his usually calm and peaceful countenance. Gareth, greatly fearing that his uncle was going to refuse this wonderful offer, urged passionately :

" Let me go. You know I want to find my father ! "

" What shall I do without you, boy bach ? " answered Llio ; there was a break in his voice, his sensitive lips quivered.

" I'll come back," cried Gareth, pulsating with the warm ardour of youth to be up and doing. " And you'll be glad when I bring my father home with me."

Thus was Llio persuaded to give his permission for Gareth to accompany Captain Dan on his voyage.

That night Gareth stole away along the road and he

made for Llanina Priory. He dodged Parry, the lodge-keeper, who lived at the lodge with his wife. Keeping in the shadows of the trees that formed a natural archway over the drive, at length he reached the Priory. He had heard men talking on the quay how love was made to the girls. A handful of gravel on the window pane, a low subtle whistle as a signal outside the house of the beloved. . . . The lower windows of the Priory were in darkness, but at the side there was a window with a light.

With a beating heart Gareth put his finger between his lips and he made a sound like a bird. There was no sign of life. He paused and gave another shrill whistle, but still no sign. Then of a sudden the dark bushes parted, and Mervee, clad in white, with a terrier at her heels, came running along. When she saw the dark figure, she cried out :

" Who are you ? "

Gareth could not speak for a moment. She was so wonderful, like a fairy, one of the little fair people, of whose fantastic antics he was never tired of reading in the folklore of his people. White silk stockings covered her shapely legs, and white satin slippers her little feet. There was a sheen of pearls around her throat, and her skin reminded Gareth of the blossom that makes hedge and meadow fragrant in spring-time.

" I'm Gareth."

" Why, yes, silly of me not to recognise you," laughed Mervee. " But whatever are you doing here ? "

" I came to find you," said Gareth boldly.

" I don't know what my father would say. He's very strict with me, you know, thinks a lot about discipline and all that sort of thing. It's a fever they bring back with them from India, I believe," she laughed mischievously.

" Once I thought I'd go straight to the big door and ask for you," Gareth declared, " but I know the boys in Llanina whistle for their sweethearts."

" Anyway I am glad you didn't ask for me, or I should

have got into an awful row. I am supposed to be in bed up there," she pointed to the light in the window above them. " But I often have a run with Taffy when they think I'm asleep."

" Dare you come for a stroll on the beach ; just this once," he pleaded, " because I'm going away."

" Oh, I'm sorry."

" Do you mean that ? "

" Of course I do," said Mervee. " You're such fun."

" Come down on the beach and talk," urged Gareth. " Over there across the moor, down by the ruined tower, there's a short cut."

" Just this once," Mervee retorted, " but I hope I shall not get found out."

The two went off quickly down the drive followed by the Welsh terrier. They ran across the moor and past the octagon ruined tower. They made their way down the cliff on to the beach.

" Not that way," said Gareth, " that's where the quicksands are."

" Rubbish," cried Mervee, " that's only a fairy tale."

She skipped away from him, a beautiful elfish figure. . . . He gazed at her with awe. She was not of this earth, she was more of spirit than of flesh. Suddenly she cried out ; her feet were sinking ; she fell ; and her hands sank down into the treacherous moonlit sands.

Without a second's delay Gareth threw off his coat and crawled on his stomach until he reached her. With superhuman strength he caught her by the waist and dragged her towards him. The next moment she was in his arms and he was kissing her pale frightened face. . . .

" Little sweetheart," he muttered hoarsely. He carried her over the stones into a cave, over which, from the heights above, fell glittering waterfalls on to the shore.

" What a wonderful place," cried Mervee.

" The old smugglers used it long ago," Gareth told her. " For all I know some of them may use it even to-day." And he caught her by the shoulders.

" You must never go near the quicksands again ! "

" Indeed I won't," she laughed tremulously, for she was still shaken by her fright. They sat hand in hand for some time . . . and when they parted she had promised never to forget him.

CHAPTER V

" WILL YOU BE MINE ? "

THREE years later Llio was in his study when Lisi announced Sir Islwyn Prichard.

" Well, well, that's good news. I heard he'd come to settle down at last. Show him in at once," said Llio.

When Sir Islwyn entered the quaint old-world room, he studied the tall, dignified figure of the blind man with curiosity.

" Please don't get up."

" I prefer to stand, Sir Islwyn Prichard, to welcome you home to the land of our fathers," Llio answered. " Too long has the Priory been neglected. It is a sad thing for a county when the landowners take no interest in their property. How can they know the conditions under which their people starve or thrive? It is a fine county ; in the cataract of Llanina you will find salmon. Wild fowl, partridges, woodcock, and snipe, are also to be found on your estate, and its lakes abound in trout. If you have another bent than sport, there is the romance, the history of the Ancient Cymry."

" It is all very well for you to talk of my duty to my people," Sir Islwyn retorted, " but how many of us can afford to keep up our old places? I'm a poor man; I was an officer in a Gurkha regiment in India; the title came to me unexpectedly as, no doubt, you know. My wife died in Simla, leaving me with one child, Myfanwy—who is known by everyone as Mervee. I stuck the Army for the sake of my pension. I had to do thirty-two years to get it, and I've managed it. This is the reason Llanina Priory has been shut up. Most of the money that should have gone with the property was left away from it by the late owner to God knows whom. So you see, Mister Elys, you must not misjudge poor men like myself, who are barely able to keep up their estates. Some of my own people say: 'Marry a wealthy American,' but I'm too fond of my child to risk that experiment. However I intend her to marry a rich man; that may sound cruel to a poetical idealist, but I am placing my cards on the table."

" I see trouble ahead for you, but pray be seated."

" I hear you are one of the greatest scholars in Wales," Sir Islwyn commenced abruptly.

" An exaggeration, I assure you."

" I'm not paying you a compliment," he persisted. " I am no idealist, Mister Elys. Once again I repeat I am placing my cards on the table. It will be better for Mervee to choose her rich man than for me to present her with an exacting step-mother. Now I want you to do something for me."

" If I can oblige you I shall be pleased."

" Teach my daughter her mother tongue."

Llio smilingly shook his head.

" Don't refuse my request," urged Sir Islwyn. " Mervee is a fine horsewoman. We are going to breed horses. She will visit agricultural shows with me and show off the points of our stock. I want her to be a fluent speaker of the Welsh language. I have no son. She must take his place."

There was a long pause, and Llio's sightless gaze was focused upon the man before him.

" And how old is the maid? "

" Nineteen."

" Poor little girl."

" A strange remark," Sir Islwyn exclaimed. " I consider her exceedingly lucky. What will be your terms to educate my daughter in Welsh customs, folklore, anything you like? "

" There can be no question of fees," Llio answered quietly. " Send your daughter to me, and I will place a golden key within her hand that is so priceless that no man has wealth to buy it. . . . The key to the love of Wales! The key of enchantment which will make her soul aflame with joy when she sees the sunset upon the waters of Llanina, and her heart will beat with rapture when she beholds Snowdon's granite pinnacles piercing the golden heavens."

Llio turned his face towards the doorway, when a girl's soft musical voice rang out sharply:

" How adorable to be taught by you! "

The next moment Sir Islwyn was remonstrating with the speaker, but the girl interrupted him with her persuasive pleading.

" Don't be cross, father, I was tired of waiting. I tethered our horses to the railings and gave a boy sixpence to keep his eye on them."

The years had but intensified her beauty. Her rather long, thick, curly, bobbed hair was covered by a soft felt hat. She wore fawn leggings and riding breeches, and a perfectly cut coat reaching to her knees.

" This is Mervee," said the baronet.

Llio came towards the girl, and she stood quietly waiting for him to speak. When he reached her, he placed his hands upon her shoulders. She became very still, she felt as if he were probing the secrets of her soul

" May the blessing of the Heavenly King rest upon you, my child! "

She gave a quivering sigh, and, looking up into the calm face, she said :

" Thank you ! "

CHAPTER VI

A BLACK SHEEP

Sir Islwyn, faintly amused by Mervee's gravity, studied her with pride. There were times when she reminded him of his wife, the woman who was buried in India. She had been just as impulsive, just as wayward, just as alluring. He sighed and glanced at the picture hanging over the fireplace, saying carelessly to Llio :

" Fine painting. Pretty woman. Relation ? "

" My sister Morvydd," Llio answered in a low voice.

Mervee saw the brightness die out of the speaker's face. It was as if the sun was hidden by a cloud.

" Does she live near here ? "

There was a moment's hesitation, and then, as if weighing his words, Llio answered :

" Morvydd lost her life in the quicksands of Llanina."

Mervee looked closely at the picture, and then she turned her attention to the enlarged photograph beneath it, and she recognised the boy who had long ago called her " Little sweetheart," and hardly conscious that she voiced her thoughts aloud she exclaimed :

" He looks as if one could trust him ! "

Sir Islwyn laughed.

" Another relation of yours, Mister Elys ? "

" Morvydd's son. He's abroad. When he returns he shall go to college."

" That reminds me, talking about college," Sir Islwyn remarked. " I have just appointed an old friend of mine to the living of Llanina. We were at Sandhurst together, but at an early age Pugh Gwine abandoned the Army for Holy Orders. The living of Llanina is in my gift,

as you know. I purposely refrained from filling the vacancy until I could fix it up with Gwine."

"It's a good thing that the church will have its vicar at last. It has been like a flock without a shepherd, although the curate in charge was a nice lad," Llio smiled. "We have had many hot and strong arguments in this very room."

"I hope you'll have many more with Gwine," answered Sir Islwyn genially. "I forgot to tell you, Mervee, Pugh Gwine will be with us at the end of the week. His only son is in a Government office in London."

"As I have never met them, you cannot expect me to be interested," Mervee said carelessly.

"If the son is anything like his father he'll be a really good sort, but now we must not trespass on your time any further, Mister Elys. Good-bye." Sir Islwyn shook the preacher warmly by the hand.

"When shall I come?" asked Mervee. "When will you place the golden key into my hand?"

The sound of the impulsive young voice was sweet to the blind man. It made him think of flowers, of birds and the woolly things that have their habitation in the bosom of the soft brown earth.

"To-morrow," he answered gently. "At eleven o'clock, Lisi shall place a chair for you at this table. A writing pad, ink, and pens—your very own!"

"I am truly grateful for your kindness," Sir Islwyn declared.

"The gratitude is all on my side," Llio answered. "There are times when a man is lonely, and at such times the finest philosophy in the world cannot heal his wound."

Soon afterwards Mervee was astride her horse again, and her father rode by her side. Whilst the horses had been tethered at Carreg Ina gate, it was noised about that the Squire and his daughter were with Llio. Many people came to the doors of their dwellings as father and daughter passed through the village. The natives were

filled with curiosity to see the new lord of the manor who at last had come to reside among them.

When Sir Islwyn and Mervee reached the top of a hill, the girl turned her happy face towards her father.

"Let us leave the road," she begged, "and take a canter across the moors."

"Splendid!"

The next moment she was galloping across the country, and her father, one of the finest horsemen in his regiment, did not find it easy to keep up with her. She was like a boy, slim and agile. His heart warmed with love for his child, and then for one moment the old bitter thought destroyed the joyousness of his reflections. If only she had been a boy, his heir—heir to this princely inheritance that had come to him! To the right were the towering mountains, to the left the sea. They passed an old tower, and Mervee gave a little cry of breathless wonder.

"Oh, father, look at our home!" She had reined in her horse, and Sir Islwyn followed suit.

"Yes, our home," he ejaculated with pride—pride in his inheritance, and pride of his child. "There is no place so beautiful," said he, pointing with his hunting crop towards the historic pile that lay before them.

Llanina Priory was one of the most conspicuous features on the romantic coast. Its ruins ran parallel with the restored portions of the magnificent mansion which, centuries ago, had belonged to the Princes of Wales. It had been given as a dowry to Nesta, daughter of Rhys ap Tewdur to one of Sir Islwyn Prichard's ancestors. The Priory was situated on a neck of land washed by the tide of two estuaries. The rooms were arranged around a quadrangle, with an immense bastion at each corner containing handsome chambers. Sir Islwyn and Mervee passed through the carved stone gateway bearing the Prichard arms into the court. All the south-west of the Priory showed old towers. The front faced the sea, but it was surrounded by a park which at one period had been celebrated for its deer.

A groom led the horses away. In the hall a butler came hurriedly to Sir Islwyn.

"The Reverend Pugh Gwine is in the library, sir; he wants to see you alone."

"Didn't expect him down in this part of the world for another week," Sir Islwyn remarked.

"I'll go and change," said Mervee hurriedly, and she made her way up the stone staircase to the room which she had chosen in the tower.

The Reverend Pugh Gwine was turning over some magazines when his old friend entered the library.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Gwine," said Sir Islwyn, holding out his hand.

The new vicar was of a ruddy countenance and he was clean shaven. His eyes were blue, his figure inclined to corpulence.

"I came down to see if I could hurry things on a little at the Vicarage," Gwine explained. "I want to get the workmen out. I want to feel settled. I brought my old housekeeper down with me and her daughter. A couple of rooms will do for me and Howel."

"Your son is in the Treasury, I think you said?"

"I've had a lot of trouble the last week or so," Gwine replied. "Thought it better to tell you about it, Prichard. Didn't want to write. Didn't want you to think it strange Howel is here in Llanina with me. He has lost his job. Don't know the circumstances, and he's too reserved to tell me. It is all very unfortunate."

"Bad luck, old friend. If there's anything I can do——"

The Reverend Pugh Gwine looked relieved.

"Office life doesn't suit Howel," he declared; "besides, the couple of hundred a year that he inherited from his mother gives him just enough head to make him play ducks and drakes with everything. He did well at Oxford. Now if you wanted an agent he'd be excellent in that capacity. He's a fine rider, too. He'd help Miss Prichard to show off the horses at agricultural meetings.

Besides, you know, Prichard, he'll be all right later. His aunt, Lady Mari Wynne, is a rich woman. She told me herself that all she has will one day go to Howel. It's just a little difficult at the moment to get over this unfortunate scandal. I don't want Mari Wynne to hear of it, and I shall have Howel under my control for a time."

"I'll try and arrange it, Gwine," Sir Islwyn answered thoughtfully; "naturally, I should like to help you. I should expect just the same sort of assistance from you if you were in my position. I was talking my affairs over with Mervee the other day. I already realise that the management of the estate will be too much for me, besides I think it just as well to have 'a go-between' between tenant and owner. I was going to send a line to my lawyers to find out if they knew of such a man. A gentleman, of course, who would be likely to get on with the people. No frocks and frills you know. The other sort is good enough in one way, but inclined to be a little afraid of his ground, and in nine cases out of ten he becomes a damned swanker."

"Then you will try my son?"

"Certainly."

"I shall never forget your kindness," the Vicar exclaimed, and he emphasised his gratitude with another "never," "and now I must get back to the Vicarage."

"Nonsense, stay to dinner."

"But Howel?"

"I'll send one of the men down to the Vicarage with a note. I'd like to have a talk with him."

Pugh Gwine thought hard for a short time and then he said: "No, I think I'd prefer to get home. Let us come another night; besides, it would be better if you had a business talk with Howel in the morning before he comes here to a social function or anything of that sort."

"My dear Gwine, do just as you like."

"May I ask one more favour? Don't mention the reason why Howel has come to Llanina to Miss Prichard."

Sir Islwyn nodded:

"Certainly, if it is your wish."

That night at dinner, which was served in a small room leading out of the great dining-room with its rare tapestries and armour, Sir Islwyn told Mervee of Pugh Gwine's visit; her face clouded.

"His son will be terribly in the way," she sighed. "I shan't want his help at shows."

"Let us try him for a year. I should like to oblige Gwine. We will see how the plan works. That would not bind us."

"A year will soon pass," Mervee answered, "but I feel that we should get on better without him."

CHAPTER VII

GARETH

THE next morning, when Mervee went into the library to speak to her father before going down to Carreg Ina, she was introduced to Howel Gwine and the vicar. Howel was tall, fair-haired, with deep-set grey eyes. He had a manly figure, and rather full lips, which showed a row of white but uneven teeth when he smiled. He sported riding breeches, suede leggings, a soft collar, and a dark tie. His rough tweed coat was finished off with leather buttons.

Howel did not hide his admiration for the girl, who was the heiress of Llanina Priory. Her white dress showed off her glowing beauty, and just as her riding kit accentuated the boyish lines of her figure, so the white frock revealed her alluring womanhood, the sex magnetism which is ever an unconscious lure to man.

"You two must be friends," said the Reverend Pugh Gwine earnestly.

Mervee looked up and met Howel's rather familiar gaze.

"I hope your son will be useful to my father," was her quiet answer. A few minutes later she was walking rapidly through the park. On reaching the road she took a short cut across the moor, passing the tower, that stood at the edge of the cliff.

Lisi welcomed her arrival at Carreg Ina.

"Well, indeed, the master is waiting for you, girl fach," she cried, "but he is very excited to-day. Gareth is talking of coming home." The woman's eyes filled with tears. "I'm excited too, my dear. Was he not like my own baba after Miss Morvydd died? Did I not choose all his clothes when he went to sea? Me and the master went off to Cardiff. Well, well"—Lisi went on eagerly, finding a sympathetic listener—"Gareth had two fine pairs of seaboots, three pairs of grey woollen socks, a tarpaulin coat, two jerseys, a pair of trousers, a reefer coat, and a blue cap. I made him a hussif out of a roll of red flannel and oil skin. I bordered it with ribbon. I put needles, thread, cotton, and scissors inside, because Teivi says all sailors do their own mending."

"And who is Teivi?" asked Mervee.

"Well, indeed to goodness, Teivi's my husband."

Hearing the sound of voices Llio came to the door of his study.

"Are you gossiping with my pupil?" he smiled. "Lisi is a terrible talker, but her heart is as pure as Welsh gold."

Mervee saw that a chair had been placed for her at the preacher's table, pens and a writing pad just as Llio promised. He took a seat at the girl's side, and he began to explain the formation and sounds of the Welsh alphabet. But Mervee discovered that his mind was not concentrated upon his pupil. There were several closely written pages of a letter lying before him, and obeying an overwhelming impulse she said:

"Will you tell me of Gareth, your nephew, and about his mother and father? Why did he go to sea?"

The bard sat back in his chair.

"You only came into my life yesterday, a ray of sunshine creeping into the dark shadows of my soul, a gift from God. You ask me to betray the depths of my heart!"

"Will it hurt you to tell me about them?" Mervee asked gently. "I should love to hear about your nephew. He isn't a stranger. I met him once—twice, when I was a child. Isn't it odd, but I feel as if I belong to you all and to this room. I suppose it's the homeliness of it that appeals to me."

Llio did not answer for a few moments, and, when he did so, his voice was subdued.

"I'm glad you feel the homeliness of Carreg Ina. Morvydd created this atmosphere long ago. . . . A chance came for me to go to America. I was full of ambition, full of zeal to get into touch with the American public. At first I did not care to leave Morvydd, but at last I went on a lecturing tour, leaving her here with Lisi. When I had been away for a year, I received a letter from Morvydd telling me that she was married. I can remember every word of what she said about that marriage: 'You will be proud of my husband,' she wrote. 'He is tall and dark, a splendid man, I shall tell you no more, not even his name until you come home.'"

"How exciting," Mervee cried. Her little face was resting in the cup of her hands as she listened eagerly to the story.

"Later news came from Morvydd that she had a son. He had been christened Gareth. And then," said Llio, "I became restless. I sent a cable to say I was coming back by the next boat. . . "

There was a tense pause.

"Oh say no more," cried Mervee, clasping and unclasping her hands. "I ought not to have tried to probe the past."

" If you want to know us well, better that you should know us as we are," Llio answered. " When I reached Carreg Ina that night, there was the sound of weeping and of prayer. That morning the men were getting into the mackerel boats, when they saw something white on the rocks. It was Morvydd, drowned."

" Terrible ! "

" Lisi told me that Morvydd had said that her husband had gone to Australia on business. We searched diligently to discover his name, but our search was in vain. We only found a red lacquer box bearing a label whereon was written by Morvydd : ' This box is to be opened by my son Gareth on his twenty-first birthday. If he should not live to that age, this box is to be burnt with the seal unbroken.' "

Mervee got up and walked across the room, and she gazed long and silently into the features of Morvydd, and then she studied Gareth. How handsome he was. His expression fascinated her. It fired her blood. It made her long to hear his voice again. In her secret heart she had often thought of him, that ardent youth with sincerity written upon his face and romance lurking in his smile.

Llio told her about Captain Dan Morris, the master of the full rigged sailing vessel in the Australian trade, who had taken Gareth to search for his father . . . across the high seas.

Mervee's eyes sparkled.

" It's like a book," she exclaimed.

" Yes, yes, life is often like a book," Llio answered. " At the end of the voyage, Captain Dan wrote a letter brimming over with praise of the boy. Gareth had made himself useful, filling in manifests, making up ship's papers, and keeping accounts. When they reached Sydney, Captain Dan told the ship's agent that the lad had ability, and they gave him a billet in the office. But Gareth soon tired of a stool, and, having failed to trace his father in the seaport, he went up country with the

object of making further search. His letters all showed," Llio went on with pride, " that he could bear hard knocks and show a smiling face. That he possessed an undaunted spirit in the teeth of cruel disappointment, and now he talks of coming home. . . . Read for yourself."

From that day Mervee danced in and out of Carreg Ina like a ray of sunshine.

Weeks passed into months. Under the tuition of Llio she became a proficient master of the tongue of her race. She slipped easily into the ways of the house. It became the custom for her to read Gareth's letters to Llio. His hopes, his fears, his ambitions were as familiar to her as they were to his uncle. He had tried life on a sheep farm, life in the gold fields, but, sought he never so hard, he could not find the man who begat him.

CHAPTER VIII

A DREAM BOOK

Sir Islwyn Prichard was the new broom of Llanina. He visited his tenants, drank tea with most of them, listened to their stories, and made more than one call at the great meeting-place of the men, The Bluebell. He dropped as easily as his daughter into the habits of his people. His Welsh blood gave him that curious power of adaptability which is so frequently the Welshman's secret of success. Mervee became the idol of the warm-hearted dwellers of that sea-girt and mountain-encompassed land. They called her " Mervee fach." How sweet was that name, but to none sweeter than to the man who had " lost his job " in London !

Night after night Pugh Gwine and his son came to the Priory. The first innovation that the squire made to his new home was an up-to-date billiard room. A good

billiard room and good stabling were vital to his well-being. Certain economies were necessary, but they were not permitted to invade these two departments. Therefore, as the vicar and Howel, his son, were able to give Sir Islwyn a close game, they were welcome guests.

The church and vicarage were a mile away from the Priory, the former was set in the middle of a cemetery. The nave was separated from the aisles by pointed arches resting upon plain columns. In the aisle to the right of the door entering the church was an old monument, the recumbent figure of Sir Rhys Prichard and his wife, dated 1600. On the wall near by was a large brass plate upon which the arms of the Prichards were engraved and these words :

TO THE MEMORY OF SIR IVOR PRICHARD
OF LLANINA PRIORY, TENTH BARONET,
WHO LOST HIS LIFE ON THE QUICKSANDS
OF LLANINA.

"IN THE MIDST OF LIFE WE ARE IN
DEATH."

Mervee often wondered how it was that a man who knew the treacherous coast so well, for he had lived there from childhood, should have been foolish enough to risk his life by getting into the quicksands. She thought about it when she was in the church. She dwelt upon it when she rode her horse, Llewellyn, across the moors. Nine months had passed since Mervee had first visited Llio, and still Gareth had not returned.

It is an old but trite saying that hope deferred maketh the heart sick, and Mervee had seen disappointment deepen the lines on Llio's wistful features. Then came a silence. No letters. Llio became preoccupied and reticent. It was known that when his spirit was distressed he sought the solitudes of the mountains, for there did

he seek communion with the spirit. And to Mervee also did he turn for comfort.

" Nothing could have happened to the boy ? "

" Why no, of course not," she would declare ; but at times she felt a pang of fear, although, seeking to reassure the distressed man, she would declare :

" He will give you a surprise one day."

Another time Lisi would waylay her in the hall.

" Dear me, Miss Mervee," she would cry, " if the old sea has got the boy it will kill the master." One day she complained, " Terrible dreams I've had lately, and I said to Teivi, ' Bring me a dream book for a little present. I've had a dream about cheese. Send two-and-six in a postal order to Liverpool, and I'll say you're the finest man in Wales, Teivi boy.' I've got the old book, and I looked to see what it meant to dream of eating cheese."

" And what did the dream book say ? "

" Well, strange indeed was the answer," she confessed, and, as if repeating something that she had learnt off by heart, Lisi said : " To dream you are eating cheese—this to a young person indicates that she will find a husband of sterling character, and live in happy rustic surroundings."

" That means that there is to be a wedding," Mervee exclaimed, but she added as an after-thought, " Didn't the book say anything about a sailor ? "

" Well yes, indeed to goodness," Lisi answered eagerly, " that is what I meant to tell you. For a sailor's sweetheart to dream of cheese means a speedy meeting with loved ones."

" Then I'm right," smiled Mervee, " Gareth will soon be at Llanina."

Mervee strolled across the land, and on the crest of a hill she threw herself down on the heather-covered moor. The turrets of the Priory showed against a sombre background of storm-tossed trees. Above, the sky was cloudless and blue as a sapphire. She was surrounded with yellow gorse and masses of purple heather. The

landscape for miles was jewelled in purple and gold. Soft wind caressed the loose curls that nestled against her face. Suddenly a man had reached the top of the hill. Mervee recognised him at once. He stood motionless, eagerly scanning ridges of rock, mountain, and dell, until he saw the girl's lithe figure.

"This is a pleasant surprise," said Howel Gwine.

"I came here to be alone."

"Sorry," he retorted nonchalantly, "but your father sent me to find you. He is anxious to show at Denbigh. The forms must be filled in. He told me to consult you about it. Will you ride Llewellyn at the show in the 'hunters' class?"

"How did you know I was here?"

"Mrs. Parry said you'd gone to Carreg Ina, and I knew your favourite way home."

"Housekeepers should mind their own business," Mervee snapped.

Howel calmly lit his pipe, and leaning towards Mervee he said:

"Your charms are positively devastating when you're angry. As I have told you more than once, insipid angels bore me, but a girl with the spice of the devil in her——"

Mervee made a gesture of annoyance.

"I won't listen to you."

"That's impossible. Your father told me I was to discuss the Denbigh show with you."

She gave a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders.

But to a man of Howel's temperament Mervee's indifference fanned the flame. From the first day that he had met her in her father's library he had been attracted to her. This attraction had now become an obsession. It lured him to indiscretion.

"Be kind to me," he begged. He saw that she was annoyed, also that she was on the verge of tears. Her cold reception added to her charm. He was no stranger to flattery and adoration.

"There is no question of my being kind or otherwise,"

said Mervee. "The fact that the vicar happened to be an old friend of my father's, does not give you the right to treat me as anything more than an acquaintance."

"That's absurd," Howel persisted, "we see each other every day. We ride together. Business——"

"That reminds me," Mervee interrupted. "I thought you were going to see the lawyer about the land which the Parish Council want to take over for the golf links. Your father told me you had gone when he came up to the Priory this morning, Mr. Gwine."

"He makes mistakes like the rest of us," Howel retorted. "By Jove, I wish you'd drop formality; what is wrong with my Christian name, anyway? Everybody calls me Howel after they've known me twenty-four hours. You've known me for months. It seems as if I had been your father's agent for centuries. You know what you are to me. A man can't rub shoulders with you day after day as I do and remain an iceberg! If only you'd be decent! What's the good of disguising facts? Your father is not young, he's seen many years' foreign service. If anything happened to him—— Oh, I don't want to be a beast," he went on recklessly, "but with all this on your hands"—he pointed to the country—"you need a man at your right hand. I want you to realise that I'm not only a fair-weather friend; when sorrow comes I want to share it with you."

"Why don't you stick to your job," she said coldly. "I am going to ride Llewellyn at Denbigh, that's the answer you wanted, is it not?"

"You come between me and my work," Howel declared with sudden passion. "You've come between me and everything in the world. I've tried to fight it, but it's useless. I know your father's ideas about a rich husband for the heiress of Llanina."

Her eyes blazed with anger. She sprang to her feet.

"I won't listen to you."

"I've tried to kill it," Howel went on stormily. "You know it. My fate was sealed from the first moment I

met you. I want riches, just as much as your father desires them for his property. I have always wanted riches, that's why I gambled and got mixed up in a raid in London, and my name was in the papers among an undesirable crowd. This notoriety didn't hurt them. It was an amusing experience! But the chief of my department got news of it and here I am!"

"So that is why you came to us," Mervee exclaimed furiously. "My father's very loyal in his friendships."

"I'm telling you this," Howel retorted, "because I love you."

Mervee's blood flared up, and she stamped her foot.

"Your love-making is intolerable," she cried distressfully. "If I complained to my father he'd——"

"He could not blame me for falling in love with you," Howel interposed quickly. "You are a temptation to any man. Your face, your figure, your mouth——"

"Please don't," Mervee shuddered. She did not hide the repulsion that she felt for this unwelcome wooer. "You are too impossible. Even Llio the preacher——"

"Blind, narrow-minded fool, my father says."

"It wouldn't interest me in the least if you repeated his remarks," Mervee retorted furiously. She was very pale, but maddening in her anger. Howel, lusting to tame her, caught her by the wrists and stooped towards her as if he would kiss her. She struggled away from him and hit him across the face . . . but afterwards she was so deeply humiliated that speech failed her. Her small flower-like features were as white as death.

"Coward!" And without another word she walked quickly away towards the Priory.

So this was love! A frown puckered her dark eyebrows. It was certainly a disturbing emotion, elusive, a will-o'-the-wisp. Perhaps one day it would come to her . . . or had it come already? Had she fallen in love with a dark youth with smiling eyes? Had she been wooed unconsciously by the letters that had been written to Llio from across the sea? Had love stolen her heart

just as a thief in the night may steal a woman's jewels? . . . Gareth! At the thought of his name she smiled. Gareth! His name was wooed by the winds that caressed her fresh young beauty. . . .

That evening Sir Islwyn told her that the vicar was coming in for a game of billiards, and perhaps "his son would come too." Mervee shrank from meeting Howel after their heated encounter of the afternoon. She made excuses to get away from the Priory, and her father was not altogether surprised when she said:

"I think I'll run down to Carreg Ina for an hour."

As she made her way to the house of the preacher, she thought that never had Llanina looked so wonderful as on that night. The moon shed her glittering spell upon the bosom of the waters which stretch forth from Llanina Bay, until their vivid blue, green and opalescent splendours merge into the rollers of the vast Atlantic.

Bordering the cliff leading to towering boulders of rock and long treacherous sand, ran a row of cottages that were used by the coastguards for a station and dwellings. At the edge of the sea was the village and the Bluebell Inn. Here it is that on winter nights the oak benches are drawn closely around a roaring fire. The natives sharpen their wits in argument, and seafaring men vie with each other in their yarns of the old devil sea!

Lisi opened the door to Mervee.

"Oh, my dear, the cable has come. Gareth will be here any day and the master is happy; listen to his singing. It is months since I have heard him sing the old hymns to himself."

On the threshold of the study, Mervee paused, awed by the intensity of the singer, as the words rippled through the quiet room:

"I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright! . . ."

Mervee turned aside. She felt that she was treading upon holy ground. She could not disturb this exalted mood with her petty worries. She began to take a saner view of Howel's love-making. She must combat it with quiet determination. She felt foolish, childish. She was not the first girl who had had love made to her by a man whom she detested, and it was very certain that she would not be the last!

She found herself passing through the village towards the quay. The sea air was exhilarating. She would walk as far as the lighthouse. It was the favourite promenade for the youth of Llanina, that walk along the old flag-stoned quay. On reaching the lighthouse it was the custom, before turning back, to kick the stone base with the right foot "for luck." In one spot the stone was worn with the footprints of the superstitious. Half in mischief, half under the spell of Celtic superstition, Mervee kicked the lighthouse; then she turned to find herself face to face with Howel. She was dumb with anger, for the first thought that came to her mind was that he had followed her. To her amazement there was no welcoming light in his eyes.

"Whatever are you doing here at this hour?" he cried.

"I might say the same to you," she replied in astonishment, for there was fear, distress, a desire to get away about his manner that she could not understand. Muttering something about "business," he walked rapidly down the quay.

Still struggling with her astonishment, Mervee stood at the edge of the pier watching his departing figure. Steps were cut in the stonework of the quay. They led down to the boats, to the sea, when the tide was in; to the yellow beach, when the tide was out. She heard the splash of oars, a boat drew in, and someone came laboriously up the steps. A man reached the top, he was holding his bandaged wrist. He lurched towards Mervee, and her blood leapt at the sight of him.

It was Gareth! Gareth, twenty times more attractive than when she had last seen him. His virile manhood was captivating, so was his dark hair.

"Oh, I'm hurt," he muttered. "I've been shot. Oh, my dear, thank God it's you!"

CHAPTER IX

THE GOOD FAIRY

THERE are times in the most uneventful of lives when one experiences an intense feeling of unreality. Delirious joy, crushing sorrow, possess the power to create that emotional condition. It comes swiftly like a dream, and this sensation gripped Mervee in its throes when she found herself supporting Gareth and that poignant cry fell upon her ears:

"Thank God it's you!"

How natural it was to Mervee that he came for succour. The quay was deserted; he leant heavily against her. He was a big fellow, strong and stalwart. She had been quick to notice his manliness. The moonlight betrayed his haggard features, the bitter dejection of them, and suddenly her memory was directed to another scene. The quiet study at Carreg Ina, the saintly bard, and the almost fanatical ecstasy with which he sang:

> "Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
> And all thy day be bright. . . ."

She did not question Gareth, her one thought was for Llio. He must be spared shock and distress. Gareth must not go to Carreg Ina in this dishevelled state. She remembered the ruined tower on the way to the Priory, the short cut across the moor.

" I will help you," she said quickly.

In silence she guided him to the haven of refuge, to the octagon tower at the top of the cliff. Half dazed, Gareth stumbled into this sanctuary. The ground was covered with soft warm bracken, the massive stone pile was a complete shelter from the wind. Through the great niches which once had marked a pointed window, the sea was visible, shimmering in the moonlight like a woman's gown of silver, as it caressed the golden sands. He sank down upon the dried bracken with a sigh of relief, his shoulders rested against the ivy-festooned stone wall. Kneeling at his side, Mervee examined his wrist. She saw that it was still bleeding profusely. Taking a white silken scarf from her shoulders, she tore it into strips, and, knotting one portion of it to form a tourniquet, she bound it firmly into a figure of eight bandage.

" There, that's better. Keep quiet," she implored him. His stillness alarmed her, she saw that his eyes were closed. " Oh ! Won't you speak to me ? " she cried. He tried to mutter his thanks, but he was faint from pain. " Don't move," Mervee begged him. " Promise me that you won't stir before I return." A faint inclination of the head indicated his acquiescence to her demand.

She ran swiftly across the moor to the park, and, skirting the wide drive which led to the Priory, she made her way into the hall. Her demand for food and wine caused the housekeeper no surprise. She had long since taken up her position as the lady bountiful of the district. With her basket slung on her arm, she was a welcome visitor in many a sick home, the good fairy to many a young mother who found means a little straitened when there was still another mouth to feed.

Mervee discovered by a discreet question to the butler that her father and the vicar were still engrossed with the billiard table. She made her way back to the tower. She had slipped a powerful electric torch into the basket ; this, she told herself, would enable her to make a closer examination of her patient's wound.

Gareth was in the same position as when she had left him. Mervee shielded the light with her hand, so that it would not dazzle him. She was studying his attractive features when he opened his eyes and stared at her, as one awakening from a dream.

"Ever since the first day I saw you . . . I haven't forgotten you for an hour," he muttered.

"And I haven't forgotten you," she whispered, seeking to comfort him.

He feasted his eyes upon the curving lines of Mervee's figure, upon the string of pearls that lay between her breasts. She knelt at his side and fed him with some sort of bird and some fruit. He was refreshed by the wine. Time was forgotten, and always is, when man and woman seek to mate!

Side by side they nestled in the tower. It was their palace of romance, set on a high hill with the amorous music of the restless sea keeping time to the throbbing of their hearts.

Was it an hour—or eternity—before Mervee dared to break the spell!

"Tell me about it; how did you get wounded?" she urged him gently.

"It began on the boat, coming home. The beastly plot," he said hotly. "I met a man casually one day on deck, and he asked me if it was true that my home was in Llanina. 'Well, yes indeed,' I told him proudly, for to me there is no place in the world like home and Wales! He explained," Gareth continued, "that a friend of his had a trawler and that he was meeting the boat, he said: 'I intended going to Llanina to give this wallet to a friend of mine, a gift from an old pal from Australia. But as I want to get to London quickly, will you hand it to my friend and take my place in the trawler?' 'How shall I know your friend?' I asked him," Gareth went on. "'The man who meets you on the quay and says: "Have you a message from Australia," is the man,' was the answer that I received."

" A queer tale," sighed Mervee.

" I liked the idea of returning to Llanina in a trawler," Gareth confessed. " On arrival at the wharf, my ship acquaintance introduced me to his pal. We reached the trawler by means of a small boat. We sailed at once for Llanina and, within a mile of the shore, we dropped anchor and went off towards the quay in a trawler's dinghy. On passing the coastguard station we were hailed to stop. The oarsman wouldn't do so. The next minute fire was opened on us and I was hit. My new friend hastily landed me and went off. I saw no man on the quay . . . only you, my dear." She felt the pressure of his arm around her waist. " The wallet is in my pocket. To-morrow I must find the owner."

" That should not be difficult."

" I wonder," said Gareth slowly, " if I was born under an unlucky star, and yet that sounds absurd now "—his warm breath fanned her cheek—" for have I not found you ! "

" I wish I could bring you luck."

" Of course you will." He got up, and they both leant against the stone wall and looked across the water.

" I often dreamt of this when I was abroad," he declared. " I used to wonder if you would ever become as dear to me as you have become to Uncle Llio. More than once in his letters he has written that you were the light of his eyes."

" It was nice of him to say so," said Mervee tremulously. They saw the first red glow of dawn gilding the azure heavens above them. " That means I must go home. . . ."

With his right hand Gareth lifted the basket, and she crooked her arm so that the handle could hang upon it.

" Your wrist does not hurt you very much ? "

He bent over her.

" You have healed me."

" I am only an amateur ; see the doctor after you have had some breakfast."

"Very well," Gareth promised, "if you'll come down to Carreg Ina."

They were walking across the moor. At the lodge gates they parted.

"Promise, promise," Gareth insisted.

Mervee smiled faintly and she coloured under the passion of his gaze. "Well, of course, I have a lesson with Mister Elys."

"Oh! hang the lesson," Gareth protested. "Come to see me. . . ."

The lamp was still burning in the hall, and the door unlocked when Gareth reached his uncle's house. He gave a sigh of contentment as he made his way to the room that at one time had belonged to his mother, Morvydd, Maid of the Sea.

CHAPTER X

THE VICTIM

When Mervee opened her eyes in the sunlit room at the Priory, the first thought that came to her was this: Gareth is home! She pictured the scene at Carreg Ina. Llio breakfasted early. To-day he would no longer face the depression of a solitary meal. His well-beloved, his sister's son, would share his table.

When Mervee joined her father he was reading a daily newspaper. She tiptoed across the room and, placing her hands beneath his smooth shaven chin, she kissed him.

"Ah, there you are, my dear," Sir Islwyn exclaimed. "Just in time to give me a second cup of coffee. We had an excellent game last night. Gwine had no end of flukes, lucky bargee that he is. All the same I put up a break of twenty and beat him."

Mervee was accustomed to her father's enthusiasm for billiards. She was glad of it. Billiards provided amusement when the weather was too bad for him to take his usual exercise across the moors. She peeled an apple, and Sir Islwyn read titbits of news from the paper. Suddenly he gave an exclamation.

"By Jove, listen to this, we are living in exciting times even at Llanina," and he read aloud:

"DESPERATE SMUGGLING ON THE WELSH COAST.

"Acting on information that large quantities of drugs are being smuggled to London by aid of trawlers on the Welsh coast, yesterday an attempt was made to capture certain suspected smugglers, who were apparently attempting to land, but as they disregarded the warning to stop, fire was opened upon them. It is believed that a man was hit and a reward of £100 is offered by the Revenue authorities to anyone giving information as to the whereabouts of the wounded man."

The silver fruit knife in Mervee's hand clattered on the plate with a crash. The room revolved around her. She was dazed with fear. Gareth was the wounded man. . . .

Oh, she could not bear it! After all Llio's weary watching and waiting, this was the end!

Sir Islwyn threw the paper aside and glanced at Mervee.

"Why, my dear, what's the matter, you look startled. . . . Doing too much, that's the trouble. Gwine was saying last night before he left that, instead of turning you into a boy, I ought to find a husband for you. 'A woman's natural vocation,' Gwine remarked, 'is to be the happy mother of children. After all, Prichard,' said he, 'a grandson would be a better proposition than your girl becoming unsexed.'"

"Sweet of him!" said Mervee in a low tone. There was a time when she would have flamed up in anger at

what she would have termed the vicar's insolent remark. To-day, she was thankful for it. Thankful for anything that would enable her to hide her anxiety for Gareth's safety.

" I suppose Mister Gwine suggested a suitable husband when he gave you his advice ? " she added carelessly.

Sir Islwyn hesitated for a moment as he chose a cigar, and without looking at his daughter he answered :

" Well, yes, Howel Gwine is his aunt's heir. From one point of view there is nothing to say against him. A man who has scattered wild oats in his youth is a safer investment than the man who may want to sow them in middle age. Personally, I should like it. The Gwines come of good stock, and, even if you are not madly in love, Howel Gwine is a gentleman. Yes, frankly I should like it, Mervee . . . a grandson. . . ."

Her self-control deserted her :

" Oh, father," she cried passionately, " if you are ready to sacrifice me for the future of our race, take a young wife, and leave me free to marry where I love."

" Good heavens, are you mad ? " Sir Islwyn exclaimed in astonishment. " I am expressing my wishes, they are not commands. I think Gwine is right. Howel would make you an admirable husband."

" I cannot agree."

" Well, anyway, you know my opinion ! "

" Yes, I know," Mervee sighed. Without another word she left the room. She sent a message to the stables for her favourite mount, Llewellyn, to be saddled. She hastily changed into riding kit. She tore across the moors at full gallop, past the octagon tower, along the tramping road to Carreg Ina. She tethered her horse at the gate. Lisi met her in the hall. She was surprised to see the heiress of the Priory in breeches and riding coat. As a rule Mervee wore an attractive summer gown when she took her lessons.

" Too much of a boy like that," Lisi thought, " better

for Gareth to see her in white. Oh, girl fach," she was crying the next minute, " our boy has come home. At this moment he is with the preacher. This is indeed a glad day for Carreg Ina. With my own hands I have placed a bunch of heather over Miss Morvydd's picture. Some say that the dead know all we do, that they are always near to those whom they love. Well, indeed, if that is true, Miss Morvydd will be pleased to see her son safe back in the old home."

When Mervee entered the study, for once Llio had forgotten that his pupil was due for a lesson at ten o'clock. Her accustomed chair was missing from the writing table. There was no paper for notes, no dictionary.

Gareth's back was turned to her, and Llio was facing his nephew. His sightless gaze was focused upon his idol, his features were alight with happiness. This indeed was a great day, a day of thanksgiving. Later he would make his way to the mountains. There he would prostrate himself before the Throne of God, for is it not set upon the vastness of the wild and precipitous heights of Cambria? Later, Llio would raise his head towards the heavens and he would cry out all that was in his soul, as was his custom when joy came to him, or when sorrow desolated his being.

He heard the sound of Mervee's foot upon the threshold. He, too, had learnt a secret, that even as Gareth was dear to him, so daily companionship with the maid of Llanina made her doubly dear. But the love of woman was not for Llio, and at night his fingers wandered over his version of Braille, and he read aloud:

> " I made a covenant with mine eyes,
> Why then should I think upon a maid? "

" Girl fach, no lessons to-day, but a glorious holiday for you and me. Morvydd's son has come!"

Gareth jumped up and turned and faced Mervee.

Their eyes met and held each other, without one word they greeted one another:

> Behold thou art fair, my beloved,
> As the apple trees along the trees of the wood,
> So is my beloved among the sons. . . .
> Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee.
> Awake, O North Wind, and come, thou South;
> Blow upon the garden, that the spices hereof may
> Flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden
> And eat his pleasant fruits. . . .

Pleasant fruits of love. Mervee blushed like a red rose, but Gareth was pale, his eyes dark, burning. She felt his brown hand crush hers. It rested like a white flower passively within his own.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" Llio asked puzzled by the tense silence. "You are not strangers, but friends, great friends." He got up and advanced towards them. "Give me your hands," said he, but the next moment he, too, became silent, for he felt the throbbing tell-tale hands of youth tightly locked together. They were already scaling heights which Llio, with life behind him, could never know. He felt a vague regret for that mystic paradise of which Solomon wrote: "A fountain of Gardens, a well of living waters, and the streams from Lebanon."

"There, there, that is fine, my secret wish will be gratified," he sighed; "you two will become comrades, my two dear children."

Mervee glanced down upon Gareth's wrist. The strands from her silken scarf still bandaged it firmly. He looked up and smiled, and, when Llio turned away from them, he said in a low voice so that his words would not be overheard:

"I have not been able to slip away to the doctor yet. . . ."

Mervee shook her head and compressed her lips. She made signs that he should say no more on the subject.

The intimacy of her warning warmed his heart. Gareth was suffering intense pain from his wound, and he had only been waiting for an opportunity to slip away from his uncle without attracting attention.

"If there are no lessons," said Mervee, "I'll go for a gallop. I must not intrude upon your happiness to-day. I'll turn up as usual to-morrow."

"My dear, you talk like a stranger, not as one of us. You don't know what she has been to me, Gareth; the solace of my loneliness. Do not desert us, Mervee. Share our joy."

"Well, indeed, I am glad you regard me as one of yourselves," she replied, "but Llewellyn will be pawing the earth to pieces." And whilst she was speaking, she glanced surreptitiously at Gareth; she wanted to warn him of his danger.

"Mervee likes her own way," smiled Llio. "If she has made up her mind to go, nothing on earth will persuade her to stay."

"Oh, I'm not quite so terribly stubborn as that," Mervee protested, and she bent over Llio and touched his white hair with her lips.

Gareth followed her into the garden.

"Don't go to the doctor," Mervee said hastily "You must not let anyone know that you have been wounded."

Gareth gazed with some surprise upon her distressed features.

"What has happened; you have heard something?"

Then she told him of the story that her father had read aloud to her at breakfast. Of the £100 reward offered by the Revenue authorities to anyone giving information as to the whereabouts of the wounded man.

"Shameful, shameful," Gareth exclaimed passionately. "I have not looked inside the wallet. I can guess what it contains—some vile drug. I shall not rest until I have found the man to whom it belongs, and then, well, he shall suffer the full penalty of the law if I have my way."

"I will help you to find him," Mervee declared. "But meanwhile it will be safer if you will allow me to attend to your wrist. I've got some lint and stuff in the wallet in my saddle. I thought we could hide it under a stone in the tower, and then perhaps at ten o'clock or three o'clock each day, until it gets well, I will attend to it for you."

"A rash promise," he smiled. "If you are going to see after it for me I hope it will take a long time to heal, and so if I come along at three o'clock——"

"Boy bach," said Mervee, "do I not know you are in pain? This is the reason why I would not stay on at Carreg Ina. Meet me at the tower in half an hour." And with these words ringing in his ears, Gareth watched her gallop away

CHAPTER XI

WHEN PAIN IS SWEET

PAIN is, of a truth, as sweet as honey when love is the handmaid that assuages its ache. At least, so thought Gareth when he found himself once more in the tower. Mervee unwound the remnants of her silk scarf that had bandaged his wrist. She would have thrown it away had Gareth not checked her impetuous movements.

"No, no," he remonstrated, "I will treasure it until the day of my death."

Mervee's red lips parted in an amused smile.

"Dear me, you are romantic."

Then she became businesslike. She bathed the ugly wound, placed a dressing upon it, and bound it up neatly. They perched themselves upon stones, and gazed through the niches in the walls. They saw the mackerel fleet on the far horizon, the quay and the ships; and Gareth

feasted his eyes upon the old familiar scene, and for a time there was a silence between them, a silence that was at last broken by Gareth.

"My uncle has a great desire to send me to college," he confided. "We were discussing the subject when you came in this morning."

"Yes, he has told me of his ambitions many times," said Mervee, "but I always thought that you would want to choose your own career."

"Strange that you know me so well."

"Very natural, you mean," she corrected. "Llio talked of you incessantly during your absence. I wondered," she confessed, "when he made his plans for your future, what you would think of them."

"Wandering about the world has created a spirit of unrest in me," said Gareth, "an unrest that will never be satisfied until I find my father."

"The world is such a big place," said Mervee, instinctively trying to comfort him, "besides, Llio——"

"With all his goodness, he is not my father," Gareth interrupted despondently.

Shortly afterwards they parted, and lint and iodine were placed in a tin box and hidden away under a stone for further use.

"Until to-morrow then," said Gareth, pressing her little hand within his own, and bending down he kissed her. . . .

Mervee had not gone far across the moors when she saw Howel riding towards her. He looked irritable and worried.

"I've been to the Priory twice. They told me you were riding, and then, later, that Llewellyn was back in the stable again; I may have to go up to London on business for a day or two."

"More adventures?"

Howel flushed.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. I only wondered if you found the

country too quiet after all the excitement that you had enjoyed in the past."

"I shall never want to leave this place as long as I live, if you will be kind to me."

"Oh, don't let us have a repetition of yesterday afternoon."

"By the way, it isn't very discreet for a girl like you to be knocking about the quay late at night!"

"And why not, pray?"

Howel grinned.

"Look in the glass, my dear. Even a country yokel, or a wastrel in a blue jersey may have an amorous eye for a pretty girl."

"Everybody knows me at Llanina. I am perfectly safe wherever I go by night or by day."

"But there are smugglers about—desperate fellows—your father is alarmed. As he is a magistrate he is naturally eager to assist the Revenue authorities."

"That reminds me," said Mervee, "did you hear a shot when you were on the quay last night?"

"Not a sound," Howel retorted. "I didn't like to force my company on you after your treatment of me in the afternoon. Besides, one never knows," he went on crudely, "even the heiress of Llanina may have a secret lover."

She ignored his taunt, for suddenly it occurred to her that, at this stage, Howel might be more useful to her as a friend than an enemy.

"It would be exciting," she remarked, "if you and I found the smugglers. I am going down to the quay to-night. I shall hide in one of the recesses, and watch and wait."

"I wonder what your father would say to such an escapade."

"He has always wished that he had a son, so it would be foolish for him to object to my behaving like one."

"Sir Islwyn would be furious if you interfered in a case of this sort."

"Will you go down to the quay and keep a sharp look out?"

Howel glanced at Mervee suspiciously. Being a man who never acted without a motive, he was cautious about complying with her request, until he fathomed her reason for making it.

"My father would be enormously pleased with you," she said artlessly.

"I'll see what can be done!"

A week slipped by, a glorious week for Mervee and Gareth. Llio scented the romance that was flourishing within his home.

"She is wonderful," Gareth had confided. "I shall go away again. There is money to be made in Australia. If she loves me, she will wait for me."

"And college?"

"Uncle, I'm sorry——"

"I am an old man," Llio remonstrated. "Stay here for a time and complete your studies, then we will talk things over. I have enough for the two of us."

"But I want a wife!"

Llio laid his hand compassionately on Gareth's dark head. "Follow your bent whatever it may be, my boy, but do not leave the country again."

So, for the moment, Gareth set the old man's heart at rest by falling in with his wishes. Night after night he haunted the quay hoping to track the owner of the wallet. He peered into many faces, longing for the question that was also to be the signal: "Are you the man from Australia?"

One night a strange thing happened. The tide was far out and Gareth wandered across the beach. Groups of men were talking beneath the shadows of the stone pier, stragglers who, at a later hour, would find their way into the Bluebell Inn. There was rain in the wind and Gareth wore his tarpaulin coat, with his cap pulled down over his eyes. He made for the stone steps on the quay, the steps by which he had climbed on the night that he met Mervee

on his return from abroad. At the top of the steps a man was standing, immovable, like a statue gazing out to sea. A swift illuminating thought gripped Gareth—this was his man. He purposely lurched up against him as if he had been drinking, and then came the swift question :

" Are you the man from Australia ? "

In a moment Howel's hands were upon him.

" Then you are waiting for me ? " asked Gareth.

" Yes, for the wallet. Thought I'd missed you. I've been in an awful stew. What do you expect to make out of it ? "

" Nothing."

" Nothing ! You run all these damned risks ? "

" Yes, I'm going to hand you over to the coastguard," Gareth exclaimed.

" You must be mad. You know as well as I do that there are £500 worth of drugs in that case."

" The Revenue people will be delighted to hear that." The next moment Gareth had his man pinned tightly by the arms.

Howel struggled to free himself.

" This is folly," he persisted, " surely you and I can come to terms."

" I will make no terms with you."

" It would pay you better to keep in with me. I have influence. I am——"

" Your name doesn't concern me in the least," Gareth interrupted impatiently. " You are a trafficker in drugs, that is all my concern."

" My father is the vicar of Llanina. Pleasant situation for him and Sir Islwyn Prichard if I was arrested."

For the first time Gareth's hold weakened.

" What are the Prichards to you ? "

" I am Sir Islwyn's agent. My people and his people have been connected for a century. My own personal connection may be even greater. It is the wish of our respective families that Sir Islwyn's only daughter marries me."

Gareth's hands trembled, but no sound came from his lips.

"Now I've told you everything," Howel went on desperately. "Don't bring disgrace upon my father. Besides, I'll make things right for you later."

There was a tense pause.

"If I consent to this, are you prepared to promise that as long as you live you will never have anything more to do with this damned business?"

"My God, yes."

"Very well then, here is the wallet. Throw it into the sea."

Gareth placed the leather case into Howel's hands.

"You mean that," he groaned. "I want money badly. I always want money. We have both run awful risks. Let me keep this—I can slip away to London with it and no one will be any the wiser. I'll share it, and men like you and I——"

Gareth's hand was on the back of his neck. The merciless words fell from his lips:

"Throw it into the sea!"

CHAPTER XII

A LITTLE SLIP

THE sound of footsteps caused both men to turn, and swiftly along the quay came a slight girlish figure.

"Mervee!" Gareth heard Howel's agonised exclamation, and a wave of jealousy passed through him. Oh, could it be true that Mervee had behaved as if he were all the world to her, if her heart was given to another?

"I am not going to let you off," Gareth said firmly. "If you want a witness of your guilt don't blame

me. But if you take my advice you'll get rid of it at once."

"I'll pay you back all the same," was Howel's bitter retort as, with a swift vindictive movement, he threw the case into the water.

"Oh, Gareth, I thought you'd found your man," cried Mervee. She was unconscious that she had used his Christian name. At the sound of it Gareth flushed, but Howel turned a white scared face to the girl.

"I warned you not to come here. This man is not a fit companion for you."

"You are talking nonsense," Mervee declared passionately.

In the twinkling of an eye, Howel was faced with the bitter truth. He had a rival, a serious one. A rival who had the power to injure him. A rival who might be responsible for all manner of romantic impulses in Mervee's nature. No man could be blind to Gareth's striking appearance.

"A sort of cross between a sailor and a gipsy," Howel thought contemptuously. "An outsider!" But it was the dare-devil type of man who would possibly attract a woman, he thought ruefully. Anyway, he decided he would take good care to nip this little affair in the bud as quickly as possible.

Mervee was puzzled by the attitude of the men.

"How long have you known my father's agent?" she asked Gareth.

"Not more than a few minutes," was his cautious reply.

"He promised the other night to help us to run the smuggling gang to earth. So I am very glad you two have made friends!"

The men were silent, filled with defiant hatred of one another.

"Apparently it is a case of two's company," said Mervee, nettled by their manner and failing to understand it. Turning to Gareth she asked: "So you have not found your smuggling friend?"

He made no reply, and Howel interposed swiftly : " My father has gone to the Priory. Let us take the short cut back."

With a sense of despair Gareth saw Mervee turn to Howel, and he heard her say in her artless way, and with that feminine desire to convey to Gareth that, even attractive as he was, he was certainly not the only pebble on the beach : " Come my way if you want to do so."

And to Gareth she said : " *Nos dawch.*"

He watched them walk away—the man whom, less than an hour ago, he had held in the hollow of his hand, and the woman whom he loved. An invisible barrier appeared to have come between them.

" Everything I care for seems to leave me," thought Gareth, " everything. But, my God, I mean to keep her." He fumbled in his pocket, found his pipe, lit it, and then he strolled home.

Howel dallied by Mervee in silence for a time before he commenced to question her. Even in fair Llanina the devil lurks in scented by-ways ; his emissaries are not only inhabitants of cities and cosmopolitan by-ways. Howel's lust for gambling had placed him in a difficult hole again. As usual he was on the wrong side ! He had a monthly account with a firm of well-known bookmakers, and besides this he dabbled in other things. When an easy way of making big profits was suggested to him by an acquaintance, he thought that, by judicious care, he had only to sit still and let the wind carry him along. On many occasions he had been successful. The trawler had come within sight of Llanina and the small boat had crept in at dusk. Later, Howel had sent a registered parcel to a well-known club of unimpeachable repute, and all was well ! But " Many cattle, many cares ! " Ready cash gave Howel an opportunity to do a little more plunging. He had relied upon the wallet and its innocent white powder to get him out of the difficulty. When, lo and behold, at the eleventh hour his scheme was discovered by a fool of a man who refused to come to

terms with him. The chance of making a cool five hundred was literally thrown away.

"It's not like you to be so quiet," Mervee broke out at last, unable to curb her curiosity. "Anything worrying you?"

"Nothing at all."

"When are you going to London?"

"I may not go."

"Poor thing!"

He turned upon Mervee sharply. "Are you trying to make fun of me?"

"Of course not, don't be absurd."

"Look here," Howel said savagely, "how long have you known him?"

Mervee gave an exaggerated sigh.

"Who do you mean by 'him'?"

"Gareth," Howel retorted, "dear Gareth," he went on furiously. "It is just like that old humbug Elys to decoy you to Carreg Ina, so that your enthusiasm for the unwashed Celt might lure you into an amorous adventure with the prodigal nephew."

"You are astonishingly vulgar."

"Possibly," Howel retorted, "possibly mad—mad with love."

"Don't open that subject."

"Promise me that you will have nothing whatever to do with this man."

Mervee was speechless with indignation.

"What I do, or what I may not do, is no concern of yours."

"Think of your father's position in the county—of your own."

There was a tense silence. Mervee tried to hide her anger, but it was not an easy matter. They had reached the lodge gates. Howel hesitated, hoping that she would ask him to come in to the Priory, and, as she held out her hand and said "Good-night," a wave of bitterness swept over him.

" It is no good," he said, " you hate me just as much as I love you, but never forget that all is fair in love and war," and with that remark he turned and left her.

CHAPTER XIII

WHITE HEATHER FOR LUCK

Two days later the annual agricultural show at Llandegai took place. Mervee was riding Llewellyn in the horse-jumping competition. She had not been down to Carreg Ina since the night of the meeting on the quay. Llio had gone to preach in a neighbouring town, and Gareth accompanied him thither.

Howel and a groom left on horseback for Llandegai, whilst Sir Islwyn and his daughter motored there. Mervee was a somewhat silent companion, and Sir Islwyn was worried by her manner. For a longer period than he cared to confess he had been dogged by the persistent feeling that there was a growing lack of sympathy between them. He made up his mind that, even if it was a strain on his resources, he would give a party at the Priory and invite the " county." Mervee must not be allowed to rusticate. She must meet people, wealthy people. . . . He watched her furtively as she sat at the wheel of the car, wisps of curly hair framing her pale oval features. They crossed over the stone bridge above the furious torrents of the Ogwen, which farther down the valley rushes into the sea. To the left lay Carnedd Llewellyn and Carnedd Davydd.

The keen, exhilarating air stimulated Mervee's nerves ; the scenery became wild and entrancingly beautiful. The show was held in an enormous field a mile or two outside the market town. When the white tents on the field came in sight, Sir Islwyn studied the beautiful wind-kissed features of his child. A long fur coat covered

her riding kit. This was her first public appearance, and he wanted her to create a sensation ; he wished her to be famous for her riding, famous as a beauty—the toast of the county !

Happily, Mervee was in blissful ignorance of her father's ambitions in this direction. Even when they rushed through the verdant vale, for once her eyes were blind to the glories which surrounded her. Her thoughts were all for Gareth.

As they approached the show-ground they were held up by the traffic in the road. People on foot, in carts, in motors, in charàbancs thronged the roadway, and upon the wooden stalls Welsh rock was temptingly displayed. Mervee drove the car on to the ground near to the grand-stand. She went off to find Howel and the groom who had charge of Llewellyn. Howel was in good spirits, a fine handsome man in his well-cut riding breeches and leather leggings.

" You ought to do well to-day," he said. His mood was elated. Here at least he was on equal ground with Mervee, for he was just as fine a rider as she was a horse-woman.

Having seen that her mount was all right, Mervee went off with her father to the grand-stand. They passed fat cattle, long-haired ponies from the mountains, prize sheep in pens, and a tent with mosquito curtains around it, in which a man gave demonstrations in the lore of bee-keeping. In another tent, red-cheeked dairymaids gave exhibitions in the art of milking a cow. Sir Islwyn paid little attention to the agricultural side of the show ; he was, as he explained to Mervee, " Anxious to introduce her to everybody ! " By everybody he meant his own particular class.

Mervee found herself the cynosure of all eyes.

At last came the principal attraction of the afternoon—the horse jumping. The crowds left the side-shows and congregated in a dense mass around the enclosure wherein the events took place. Mervee, mounted on Llewellyn,

was a slim, elegant figure, and Howel patted the horse's flanks and stayed at her side until they reached the opening which led into the ring. Then, just as she was walking her horse into the enclosure, somebody pushed his way through the crowd and brushed Howel aside. Mervee's grave face was wreathed in smiles and blushes when Gareth said in a low thrilling voice :

" A sprig of white heather for luck ! "

Mervee bent low over Llewellyn's mane.

" Well indeed, that's kind of you," she said, " slip it through the ribbon on my hat."

Howel looked on. He saw Gareth's action, and with an angry expression on his face he made his way to Sir Islwyn and told him what had happened.

" The man was the nephew of Llio Elys," said Howel.

" Really ! " Sir Islwyn fixed his monocle in his eye. " I know, son of the sister. Doing something abroad ; I believe Elys told me when I was there one day."

" He is damned impudent in his manner to Miss Prichard. I remonstrated with her the other day about it. You see, sir, if you give a man of that class an inch he'll take a yard. I dropped her a hint. Little awkward for me. You must have seen——"

" That you're in love with my girl ? " Prichard laughed. " Even an old duffer like myself realised that. I shouldn't object to you at all, my boy."

" Thank you, sir. I couldn't resist warning Mervee that Elys might be playing a little game, throwing his nephew across her path."

" My dear fellow," Sir Islwyn exclaimed indignantly, " love must indeed be driving you to the torture chamber, but it is rather insulting to my daughter to suggest that a man of Elys's status would be a fitting mate for her."

" Should keep her away from Carreg Ina all the same for a time," Howel persisted.

Sir Islwyn frowned.

" That's the worst of the modern girl," he said irritably; "their independent views have turned their heads. They

won't stick to their class. They are hail fellow well met with every outsider they meet. A man in my position is deuced lucky when he can find a chap like you for a son-in-law——"

He broke off, the horses were lined up, and Llewellyn bore a numbered card. Mervee was the only woman competitor.

"Let's go off to the stand," Sir Islwyn suggested. Gareth saw the two men push their way through the people and ascend the steps that led to the reserved seats. He took up a position in the crowd. His face was deadly pale, a million little wheels were whirling around his heart. He was filled with pride, but he was also a victim of fear. More than one competitor had come to grief at the water jump, that wide stretch of treacherous water, and beyond a steep erection of hurdles, camouflaged with branches of trees, was the severest test of a rider's skill. Rider after rider caught the top of this perilous fence, and at last came Mervee. Gareth held his breath. How wonderful she was! Like a bird she swept the ground with Llewellyn—fence after fence, jump after jump, amid rounds of applause from the excited onlookers. . . . And at last the water jump. Gareth shuddered. He covered his face with his hands. A deadly nausea seized him. Supposing she missed, what then? He visualised that slight boyish figure on the ground, and Llewellyn struggling to free himself. It was as if he experienced all this in a vision, a premonition of some awful nightmare to come; or was it over-anxiety on the part of a man who was head over heels in love? A cheer broke from the crowd, and Gareth dared to take his hands from his eyes. Yes, Mervee had cleared the water, and now came the high jump. She whispered something to Llewellyn, the horse responded to the call of her brain, his ears went back, and like a great bird-like monster he bore his young rider safely over the top. . . . The crowd yelled themselves hoarse.

When Mervee handed Llewellyn over to the groom, she

found herself mobbed by the enthusiastic throng. Press photographers and sightseers with kodaks begged her to stand by Llewellyn's head for "Just one moment, please!"

She looked in vain for Gareth, and her father full of pride said:

"Come along now, out of the crush. Very gratifying, my dear. We are all delighted. The cup that you have won will indeed be a lucky mascot for the Llanina stables. Howel is so pleased. Poor fellow, his excitement is almost pathetic—so human."

"Too human for me," Mervee retorted, digging her arms into the sleeves of her fur coat.

It was the next day during breakfast, the meal at which Sir Islwyn, between mouthfuls of toast, and a cursory glance of a Conservative paper, was accustomed to lay down the law for himself, his offspring, and the world in general.

"I'm afraid," he remarked, "that I have been taking a wrong line with you, my dear. I have been keeping you too much in a certain groove. We must go about more, and you must have society. More than one person told me yesterday that I had been hiding your light under a bushel. I shall have a house-party for the Eisteddfod, and Howel says that he will get Lady Mari down."

"I should loathe Mr. Gwine's aunt, just as much as I loathe him."

Sir Islwyn studied his daughter in surprise, and then after a pause, he said:

"I have come to the conclusion from things that I have heard that it was not altogether wise for me to put you under a man like Llio Elys."

"Why these strange ideas?"

"Because," her father answered, "although I am quite aware that Llio the Bard, as he is called by his admirers, is an eminent scholar, some of his people may be particularly objectionable. This man who has just come

home from abroad, for instance. I heard of his impertinent advances to you yesterday. Howel——"

"Howel is the root of all evil!"

"What do you mean?"

"He is trying to put you against the preacher, against——"

"Yes, probably he is," Sir Islwyn interrupted, "and he is quite right, too. I shall write to Mister Llio Elys. I shall tell him that I think you have acquired sufficient knowledge of Welsh and therefore it will not be necessary for you to go to Carreg Ina so frequently in future."

Mervee went white with anger.

"And if you do that," she answered quietly, "I shall not ride Llewellyn again."

For a moment Sir Islwyn found speech forbidden to him. He could not believe his own ears. That at times he had found his girl's highly strung nature difficult to control he was prepared to admit, but never had he been faced with this open defiance.

"May I ask," said he, "what is the attraction at Carreg Ina that causes you to threaten me?"

Mervee's eyes filled with tears.

"You make me unhappy," she cried. "Mister Elys has been good to me. Carreg Ina is like a second home. Why should you belittle me by writing such a letter?"

Sir Islwyn lit a cigar and toyed with the match. Worldly wisdom warned him that possibly too much opposition to his daughter's wishes would be destructive to his own ends.

"You know my wishes."

"I cannot desert Llio Elys," Mervee retorted. "I would not hurt him even if he had all the blessings which we are supposed to possess. He has happiness to which the world is a stranger, but I know only too well how much is denied to him! They talk of his peace of mind, of his contentment, of his keen perceptions, but I realise what blindness means to him." Her hands were clasped

and her eyes were filled with tears. "I hate to go against your wishes, father, but Llio Elys has often said to me: 'Girl fach, talk to me now about the sky,' and I tell him of the blue canopy above the sea, of the great clouds like banks of snow-covered mountains, and I describe the smaller clouds, flecked with gold, or with crimson when the sun is sinking in the west. And he listens, and at times with such intense longing to behold what I have described that I feel my heart will break. 'And now the sea, girl fach,' he will beg, and another day he will say, 'Tell me about Carnedd Davydd and Carnedd Llewellyn,' and I tell him of the grim peaks rising into the heavens. Of the shadows that wrap them in mystery and that Snowdon, their father, is like David the shepherd boy with his coat of many colours. . . ."

"You put me in a devilishly awkward position."

"Do not keep me away from Carreg Ina, and I will love you for all time," Mervee declared.

But at Carreg Ina, Llio was not altogether happy; Gareth was moody and uncertain, plying him with endless questions about his father, questions that he could not answer. When Mervee came to the house, a spirit of peace accompanied her. Gareth was never in the room when she had a lesson, but, although she did not know it, it was his hands that placed the chair for her at Llio's desk, his hands that set writing pad and ink in their place, and often a little bunch of flowers from the garden. These little preparations for Mervee's coming, Gareth had stolen from Llio, and Llio, with a wistful smile on his sensitive lips, knew the reason, and Lisi saw the signs that Llio could only fathom by his mind.

"Is it not fine, minister bach," she would whisper to Llio, "Teivi and I know well that there will be a wedding at Carreg Ina. Gareth bach loves Miss Mervee and she loves him that I know well. How splendid it would be for Master Gareth. His mother would be proud to see him married to a Prichard of Llanina."

"You talk wildly, Lisi," said Llio sharply. "Love

of this kind brings sorrow. Sir Islwyn will choose a rich man for his son-in-law." That night, when he sat with Gareth in the study after supper, he listened to his nephew's account of the show that he had visited that afternoon, and the story of Mervee's feats of horsemanship.

Llio sat in the shadow thinking deeply, whilst the light from the lamp resting on the desk fell upon Gareth's handsome features and betrayed the hopeless passion that was hidden in his heart for Mervee.

"I fear, my boy," said Llio at length, "that it is not the pathway of love, but the pathway of disappointment and disillusionment that stretches before you."

"And yet many times you have preached that God is love," answered Gareth. "How then can you say that love will bring sorrow to me?"

"I have known your secret from the first day that you met Mervee. I have known it and feared it."

Thus was the fire fanned into white heat, the white heat that demands words, tokens and promises. In this strange excited restless state, Gareth took the reins that held the restless steed of passion.

"Mervee, I want to see you alone," he wrote. "When you come to Carreg Ina in the morning I shall not be there, because, until I have told you all the things that are hidden in my heart, I cannot see you in the presence of a third person. Will you come to the octagon tower at nine o'clock to-night?—GARETH."

When Mervee read the letter, the first she had received from him, she pressed it to her lips.

Gareth slipped away from Carreg Ina and he made his way across the moors. To-night there were banks of clouds that hid the moon. He purposely avoided the village, for already he had made himself popular with the men, and more than once he had joined the band of

raconteurs at the Bluebell. His health had been drunk, and stories had been told, until Peggi Jones, the landlady, remonstrated with them :

" Well indeed, boys bach, closing time now, go home to your wives, and don't let the old drink get the better of you."

Gareth loved the octagon tower ; it was filled with romance for him ever since Mervee had bound his wound therein. He pushed the branches of the trees aside. Within the tower it was warm and comfortable. Gareth sat down, where, through the niche in the stonework, he could study the road from whence he had come, and the restless ocean, the mountains, and the moor.

A great fear fell upon him that Mervee would not come, and his uncle's warning throbbed a pitiless refrain in his ears : " It is not the pathway of love but the pathway of disappointment and disillusionment that stretches before you." But his heart gave a mighty throb of relief when he heard footsteps. They came nearer, the trees were parted, and a whisper reached him :

" Gareth, are you there ? "

" Oh, Mervee, Mervee, thank God you've come." As if obeying an overpowering impulse, she flung her arms around Gareth's neck and pillowed her head against his blue coat.

" You are better, your wrist is better ? "

" You cure all my ills."

How long did he hold her in his arms ? The sea chanted a love song as it broke upon the ochre sands, and the soft winds toyed with Mervee's hair, and cooled Gareth's dark skin. His kisses burnt her, uplifted her, awakening the slumbering womanhood within. . . .

" Gareth ! "

He put her gently away from him.

" Pet lamb," he cried unsteadily, " what shall we do ? "

There was a long silence before she asked him the

poignant question: "Dear heart, what do you mean by those words, 'What shall we do?'"

"I love you, Mervee fach," Gareth answered hoarsely. "I want you. I want the moon, and there is no means of obtaining my desires, without the wherewithal to buy it."

"If you mean," said Mervee shyly, "that I am the moon, certainly no money will buy me."

Then they stood apart and eyed each other breathlessly. She had come straight away from the Priory. To-night her gown was yellow, pale daffodil yellow, the colour of the spring flowers that flourish in the sheltered valleys of old Wales. Silk stockings covered her shapely ankles, satin shoes her feet, a gleaming string of pearls caressed her bosom. Oh, yes, Mervee was dazzling, exotic! Gareth drew his breath hard. For once her beauty mocked him, for once her dainty silken clothes gave him no pleasure.

"Oh, dear heart," he cried dejectedly, "it is the old, old story of the beggar who fell in love with the princess, and there is no magic lamp to guide me to the cave wherein lurks the hidden treasure."

"I am not a princess," Mervee corrected him, "and you are not a beggar. You are——"

He forgot the silk gown when he looked in her pleading eyes, and he caught her to him with a great cry.

"The man who loves you, and you . . ."

"I love you!"

The whisper was borne to him on the wind like fairy music.

"If I work hard, get a decent job——"

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief," Mervee smiled tremulously. "I will take you one day for my lawful husband, for better or for worse."

Thus did these ardent lovers plight their troth. From the shadow of a coping stone Howel looked on with bitter hatred in his heart, with evil designs springing up like rank weeds to do ill to the man who had saved him

from shame. He had been hanging about the Priory all the evening, for now his passion for Mervee was a passion that he shared with his gambling instincts. He saw Mervee steal through the trees and cross the moor and he had followed at a distance. He hid behind the tower and heard each burning word that fell from Gareth's impassioned lips. At last he could bear it no longer. He tore across to the Priory, brushed past the astonished butler, and made his way into the billiard-room, where Sir Islwyn was engaged in an exciting game with the vicar.

"She is with him now, sir, in the octagon tower. I saw them and if I had had my hunting crop with me I would have thrashed him."

"My dear boy"—the vicar looked at his son's distorted features with some anxiety, and for a moment he was stricken with the fear that he had been drinking. "Don't you understand that Sir Islwyn is regarding you as a savage, bursting upon us in this unceremonious fashion?"

Sir Islwyn placed his billiard cue mechanically in the rack. Staring hard at Howel, in a quiet lifeless voice he asked:

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"She is with that blackguard's nephew."

"She?"

"Mervee."

"Sorry, very sorry. It must be stopped. Disgraceful."

The vicar sighed. He certainly did not understand the conversation, and the two men did not help him to do so.

"If you walk straight across the moor, you will find them in the tower . . . lovers. . . ."

Sir Islwyn's head drooped upon his breast.

"Come with me, see for yourself," Howel urged.

"I cannot spy upon my own child. I presume after to-night you will not wish to have anything to do with her?"

" I am more than ever determined to marry her."

" This affair with Llio Elys's nephew is only a passing phase," Sir Islwyn muttered, trying to excuse Mervee's indiscretions, and seeking to comfort himself with his own words.

" Possibly ' only a passing phase,' " Howel repeated, " but they must be parted. She must be told that he is an adventurer. I made a discovery to-night. He is the man who is wanted for smuggling."

" Good God ! Are you certain of this ? "

" The proof is on his wrist ; I shall give information to the coastguards in the morning."

" Mervee must be saved from scandal," Sir Islwyn exclaimed violently. " Perhaps, as you are going to take prompt action, it would be just as well if I said nothing to her to-night. If this man heard by chance that his meetings with my daughter had been discovered, that the coastguards were on his track——"

" I understand," Howel agreed. " He must not know that he is being watched, or he will slip through our hands and possibly take Mervee with him. He will stop at nothing to compromise her."

That night when Gareth arrived back to Carreg Ina he found his uncle at work upon a poem. At the sound of his nephew's step his face lit into a smile.

" I don't know how you managed it," said he, " but I know that you have seen her. I can tell by the buoyancy in your step. When you went out it was as if a hundred-pound weight dragged at each heel."

" You are a wizard, uncle bach," Gareth declared ; " and now there are no heights to which I will not climb, even into Parliament,"—he chuckled—" M.P. for Llanina Boroughs. I'm going to marry Mervee—she promised me to-night. She is to be my wife."

Llio became very still, and his voice was stern and unyielding when he said :

" And did you ask Sir Islwyn's permission before you made love to his daughter ? "

"How could I—I do not know him. I love Mervee and she loves me."

"It is not right," Llio remonstrated; "you are doing wrong, my boy. Sir Islwyn placed Mervee in my charge. She was a sacred trust."

"But love is love," urged Gareth, "you must believe me. It does not stop at conventions. It is human nature that, when a man sees the woman whom he wants for his mate, he will take her, love her, cherish her. Give Mervee your blessing when she comes down here in the morning."

"I cannot give my blessing until Sir Islwyn knows and consents to your engagement."

"But he will never consent—Mervee told me so. He is only out for his personal ambitions."

"I am sorry," said Llio, "but my decision is final; you are the nephew of a penniless preacher. Why, my dear boy," he went on, "we do not even know the name of your father. I have no doubt that the secret, if it is one, will be revealed next month when you come of age, and you open the red lacquer box. All the same we must face facts. Mervee comes from a great family. She must not visit Carreg Ina again until I know that Sir Islwyn is willing to sanction an engagement between my nephew and his daughter."

"And if that happy state is never reached our lives are to be ruined?" asked Gareth bitterly.

Llio sighed.

"I pray that the crooked path may be made straight."

Howel passed a restless night. At dawn he got up and looked out upon the bay. He was going to play a difficult game, but all games worth winning were difficult. He made his way across the moors past the tower and he took the steep descent to the sands. He crossed the white road that cut between the coastguard houses and the quay. Hugh Lloyd and Ben Morris were at work, and

when they recognised their visitor he was greeted with a cheery " good-morning."

" By the way," Howel commenced, " you remember the reward offered by the Revenue authorities ; I think it is as good as won, and I think I have won it. Some people may regard it as Judas money, but I am worried with no scruples of that kind. However, I think we could come to terms—simple terms of share and share alike. The man you are seeking is at Carreg Ina, his Christian name is Gareth, his surname——"

" Nobody knows," said Ben Morris, who had no sympathy with Llio's idealism. " Anyway, you are not trying to say that Mister Elys's nephew is a member of the smuggling gang ? "

" That's just what I do mean," Howel retorted ; " at any rate go and see for yourselves. He is wounded in the wrist."

Mervee also had passed a restless night. She had decided to act with decision. When breakfast was finished she said to her father :

" You have always wished to regard me as a son ? "

Sir Islwyn, who had been rather silent, glanced up and studied her pale set features. Her eyes did not flinch when his piercing gaze was focused upon her. There was breeding and determination in her manner. For a moment he was half inclined to wonder if Howel had been right in the statement he had made the previous night—Mervee with a lover, and such a lover ! Was it not possible that Howel had made a mistake ?

" Father, why don't you answer me ? "

" What can I say, my dear ? "

" A son would have a right to choose the mother of his heirs, why should I not have the right to choose a father for mine ? "

" What an astounding idea," Sir Islwyn gasped. " Really, Mervee, these modern theories——"

"At least they are sound," said Mervee. "You would give me a wastrel like Howel for a husband, because you believe that he is coming into Lady Mari's money. I prefer a straight, fine man. He can make money and I am not penniless. I am going to marry Gareth Elys."

"You must be mad," Sir Islwyn snapped. In his exasperation he gasped for breath. "It is preposterous, he is a criminal. Howel told me so last night. He is the man who is wanted for smuggling—by this time he will be arrested."

"Howel told you this," Mervee cried. "He is a traitor"; and without another word she left the room. She never knew how she got to Carreg Ina. She did not wait to put a hat upon her head, her glossy hair half hid her eyes. Breathless and tortured she reached Llio's house.

Lisi, wild-eyed and frightened, was in the hall. Mervee heard her mutter something about "Men taking Gareth away." She pushed her aside and reached the study. Llio was standing motionless, listening to the loud voices of the coastguards, and Gareth, speechless with rage, faced his accusers.

"It is true though, Mister Elys," Ben was saying, "you did arrive by a small boat on the night of the smuggling. You did arrive with a wounded wrist."

"Oh, you are asking absurd questions," Mervee interrupted. Gareth turned and smiled, and their eyes proclaimed the undying love that each possessed for the other.

Surprised by Mervee's appearance, the men stopped their bullying questions.

"It is a wounded man we seek," Ben explained, "and Mister Gareth here has a wound."

"Anyway, this is not the guilty man," said Mervee. "Mister Elys and I were in the octagon tower together on the night you fired on the smugglers. While endeavouring to find a comfortable seat, he loosened a

piece of rock which fell on his hand. Why, you can see the scar on his wrist now," and, turning to Gareth, she said : " You can prove the truth of this. Show these men the strips I tore from my scarf ; I bandaged your wrist with them. Show them the remnants of my silk scarf which you said you would treasure for ever ! "

CHAPTER XIV

A SILKEN SCARF

THE coastguards glanced furtively at one another. Strange words indeed were these to fall from the lips of the heiress of Llanina. Ben Morris fidgeted with his feet. Mervee was standing very erect ; there was a certain dignity in her poise that reminded him of Sir Islwyn Prichard.

" Funny now," he thought to himself uncomfortably, " that the girl fach should mix herself up with the people at Carreg Ina." Awkward, too, if he and Lloyd were making a mistake in their man. Hugh Lloyd was equally disconcerted.

Llio's face was buried in his hands, his heart full of fear, full of dull foreboding. Had he not known that a love-affair between these two people whom he adored must come to a pitiless end ? But he had never imagined that this love-making would be mixed up with intrigue, or anything that would place the faintest taint on Mervee's name. It was intolerable . . . torturing. That Gareth was mixed up in a smuggling adventure hardly concerned him, inasmuch as the suggestion was too foolish to be taken seriously. Soon, however, the ugly bullying attitude of Gareth's accusers disturbed him ; a groan burst from his lips, and a prayer went up to his God.

" Oh, if I could but see, dear Lord ! If I could look upon the faces of my children, for lo ! this sorrow which has fallen upon me has made my soul dark even as mine eyes ! "

And Gareth ? Oh, he was flushed and agitated. He crushed Mervee's small hand within his own, and in this manner did he convey all the devotion which swept within him like a mighty tide.

Llio lifted his head, and in a low, troubled voice he said :

" If it is true what Mervee says, inasmuch as she has not spared herself, prove her words, my boy."

" How do we not know that he will give us the slip ? " said Morris in a surly manner, when he saw Gareth advance towards the door.

" If you are suspicious of my actions," Gareth exclaimed, " come upstairs with me."

" Better go," Hugh Lloyd advised, and he shifted from one foot to the other as he felt Mervee's calm gaze fixed upon him ; albeit he justified his presence in the quiet room by assuming some sort of authority.

Ben followed Gareth up the staircase to the top room, which long ago had witnessed the despair of Morvydd, and now these four walls encompassed the sorrow of her son. Ben stood on the threshold, and suddenly he felt an icy wind pass over him. He heard the flutter of a woman's garments—the next moment cold perspiration came upon his brow.

" Well, well, mustn't drink so much at the old ' Bluebell,' " he thought. Mechanically he watched Gareth unlock a box and withdraw some strands of discoloured white silk. And Ben, with his mouth agape, was already half-way down the staircase.

" Miss Morvydd's room, boy bach ? "

" Yes, my mother's room," Gareth retorted.

" Not for twenty pounds would I go near the old room again," thought Ben. " Wish I had not got mixed up in this business for sure. She was a pretty wench, was

Miss Morvydd fach. Pity now that I had anything to do with this nasty affair."

Mervee's arm was placed protectingly around the blind preacher when the coastguards returned.

"Now you two boys bach," said Gareth genially, "here is the remains of the scarf. Look at it well. You will see marks upon it, a stain from the wound."

The men examined the frail silken fabric, fingering it suspiciously with their coarse hands; and then they glanced at Mervee.

"Well, well, sorry indeed we disturbed you here. The proof is sound enough, eh, Morris?"

"For certain sure, man bach. Hope you will understand, Miss Prichard, when information was given to us we had to do our duty. Well, well, what is the good of getting into a hole? Good information was given to us. The squire must not blame us whatever."

"Oh, he will not blame you!" said Mervee bitterly. But, although she tried to control her feelings, her tones were tremulous.

Muttering apologies, the men took their departure; and when their steps died away Gareth, oblivious of his uncle, took Mervee in his arms and kissed her.

"Pet fach, what can I say to you? How can I repay you for your devotion to me? From the moment I staggered up the stone steps on the quay with the wallet in my hand you became my guardian angel, my own true love."

And it was all so natural, Mervee whispered contentedly, "What happened to the wallet?"

Gareth hesitated; and Llio noticed this silence with a pang of horror. These two, Gareth and Mervee, possessed a secret which he could not share—and there was another secret that Gareth would not even reveal to Mervee. His keen perceptive powers sought to pierce the gloom.

"Oh, the wallet!" Gareth answered in a strained voice. "The wallet was thrown into the sea."

" And no one knew that you had it? " asked Mervee anxiously ; for, although she knew that Howel had given information about Gareth's shot wrist, she was filled with a terrible dread that he knew about the wallet. Her distrust of Howel was now giving way to a haunting dread of him. . . . He was influencing her father ; he was a malicious and desperate lover. He had told her on more than one occasion that no man on earth should have her but himself. . . . In a vague way she knew in what manner he might prosecute his high threats. He would ultimately injure Gareth. His first attempt had failed . . . but if he made a second . . . and a third . . .

" I am glad it is in the sea," she muttered. " Tell no one."

Gareth was silent. Llio could bear the suspense no longer, and in a low, harsh voice, he said :

" Then you two know something about the smuggling."

In their infatuation for one another they had forgotten his presence.

" No man can save his soul with a lie," Llio went on sternly. " Bring not that sorrow to Carreg Ina. If you are guilty of this sin, pay the price of your guilt. Let not the persuasive tongue of a woman lead you from the light." And Llio turned his sad face to Mervee. " Forgive me, if my words sound harsh ; but even love is not strong enough to shelter the wrongdoer ; his punishment will come swiftly, and there is no peace for him."

Mervee refused to hearken unto the voice of Llio ; her only thought was for her lover.

" You showed that wallet to a man," she persisted, betraying her agony of mind.

" Be sure that I shall settle with him when the time comes," Gareth answered.

" I will trust you always. But next time——"

" There will be no next time, little sweetheart," Gareth answered. And he added with a harsh laugh, " Anyway,

I am not the first man who has been punished because he is merciful, and I do not expect that I shall be the last."

The sound of Sir Islwyn's angry voice reached the study. Mervee recognised it, and she turned a pale, troubled face towards Llio, and she whispered hurriedly to Gareth:

"I do not wish you to meet my father now. He may say things in anger. Oh, for my sake, leave us."

But still Gareth hesitated. "Oh, my dear, we must not distress Llio." And in this manner was Gareth persuaded to leave the room.

"It is Sir Islwyn," Lisi warned them. Mervee's father did not wait for ceremony; filled with what he believed to be righteous indignation, he forced his way into the room. He ignored his daughter; his quarrel was with the white-haired man standing before his desk with an expectant, questioning smile upon his features.

"Sir Islwyn, seldom do you visit us. Welcome——"

"I want no more of your humbug, you irreligious swine," Sir Islwyn cried, beside himself with rage. "I trusted you, Elys, and you betrayed me. I placed my daughter in your care, and you have allowed her name to be a by-word on my own estate. Even as I came along the road every eye mocked me. Before I can stop it every rag of a newspaper will get hold of the disgraceful story of the heiress of Llanina's intrigue with your miserable nephew. But let me tell you, sir, it must stop. My daughter will be sent away at once, to people who are better able to look after her than myself." And to Mervee he said, "You will leave this house with me at once."

"That is impossible," she answered defiantly. "Gareth is the man whom I have promised to marry."

"Absurd."

"True nevertheless," was Mervee's quiet reply. "Carreg Ina shall be my home."

Llio swept his fingers across his eyes.

"Oh, God! Oh, God, my sight!" he muttered. He came haltingly towards the girl, and he placed his hands upon her shoulder.

"Mervee, you are dear to me, but Carreg Ina cannot shelter you, until Sir Islwyn gives his consent to your marriage to my nephew."

"Then for your sake I will go," she answered quietly. "But you cannot send me away when I return." And then she followed her father out of the house.

CHAPTER XV

FORBIDDEN LOVE

Llio was no stranger to the cup of bitterness. Oft-times had he pressed it to his lips, but never had the wine possessed more biting acidity than when Sir Islwyn reviled and insulted him. Blind in sight! Blind in mind! He was as a man struggling in a dark pit from whence there was no escape. He fought out the battle when he sat before his desk, his sightless gaze focused upon the glittering waters in Llanina Bay. Gareth must go! Llanina was too small for him. He must strike out along a path of his own. He must go forth and blot out his love for Mervee by hard work and determination.

Gareth stood before the fireless grate with his hands thrust into his pockets, his face wretched; a vivid touch of scarlet glowed on his cheekbone. He was enduring physical pain—mental torture—because Mervee was forced to pay the price of love, and he, who would have willingly given his life for her, was powerless to help her. . . . His uncle's voice recalled him from his dreams.

"In a few days you will be of age, and after that day

you must leave Llanina. This is a grief that presses heavily upon me, but I see that it is the only way by which you may conquer your love for one forbidden unto you. I have a few savings—they are yours. Scour the world for peace of mind, and I pray that good fortune may smile upon you."

"So you mean to turn me adrift?"

Llio's sensitive features quivered.

"Not adrift, my boy. I only set you along a road which many a man has trod, the road that leads to a clear conscience, freedom, and duty."

"I will not desert Mervee.

"I do not ask you to desert her. She is young—few men have crossed her path. Seldom does first love abide with a maid. Experience teaches her many things: that you succeeded in fascinating her now does not mean that you will fascinate her always. Go away, and perchance one day you may return."

"No one shall part me from Mervee."

"I forbid you to meet her beneath my roof."

"You would ruin her life, just like her father," cried Gareth passionately. "I am the nephew of a penniless preacher, clean in body and mind. But that is not enough for you, or for Sir Islwyn. Mervee must marry one of her own 'set.' Howel Gwine is the husband her father has chosen for her, a wastrel, a blackguard."

"My boy, you talk wildly. Ill words never yet helped living soul. Surely you must see that the Vicar of Llanina's son is a better match for Mervee?"

"It is unbearable," Gareth exclaimed. "You shall know the truth——" He told the story of his arrival at Llanina. Llio became even as a young man when he listened to his nephew. "I discovered that the man I sought was the vicar's son. He told me that he was connected with the Prichards. To save them from scandal, on his promise to have nothing more to do with the drug traffic, I did not expose him as a smuggler and a defrauder of the King's Revenue. Later he betrayed

me to the coastguards. . . . You tell me to go away and forget Mervee. You tell me to desert her so that she can be forced into a marriage with this devil. You forbid Mervee the shelter of Carreg Ina. Very well, I will take her away, and we will starve together." And with these words he left the house. . . .

He strode along the tramping road for many a mile. And every mile he walked made him still more determined that Mervee should go with him. He took a new road that had recently been opened, a road that cut across the moors and led to what was known as Happy Vale. Upon a hill were the ruins of an old castle, and superstitious natives feared to pass Plas Twm, for various ghostly stories were told of Twm the antiquary. Gareth had heard many a legend of that mysterious Twm, who on a night determined to bring to book a highwayman whose exploits made him the terror of the neighbourhood. Twm mounted a poor horse, and, with a leather bag filled with shells, he set out to meet his adversary. At last he found himself face to face with the man whom he sought. The highwayman ordered him to stop and deliver his money. Twm feigned reluctance ; the highwayman threatened to shoot him, and Twm threw his leather bag over the hedge. Cursing him vehemently, the highwayman told Twm to hold his horse, and the antiquary obeyed. Directly the highwayman's back was turned he made off with the highwayman's horse. . . . Gareth remembered the legend as he tramped along, and a sardonic grin rested on his face.

" Wish I'd old Twm's horse now to carry her away," he groaned. He climbed up to Plas Twm and threw himself down beneath the shadow of the ruins. " If I were a rich man," he said aloud, " I would buy Plas Twm and build a little place wherein I could dwell with Mervee." Happy Vale ! It was indeed a land of fair promise. A rapid river, rugged with black rocks, tumbled and sprayed as it swept from the adjacent precipices. Near a Roman bridge were the remains of a copper-mine, and beyond are

seen the stone ruins of an old mansion. Here the woods skirted pleasantly to the edge of the river. It was joined by another river, the Avon Careg. Avon Careg, that impetuous little river that gushes forth from the summit of a high mountain, and in the rainy season it flows so swiftly that it becomes a sheet of white foam. Gareth had often heard stories of this strange, excitable river.

An old shepherd came slowly towards him carrying a newly born lamb under one arm, a couple of sheep dogs following at his heels.

"Good day to you," he called out to Gareth.

"Good day," Gareth answered carelessly, as he stood up and stretched himself. "Fine view down there—fine old place, too, in the woods."

The shepherd took off his hat, and the wind blew through his white, unkempt hair.

"Yes, yes," said he; "they call it the Happy Vale; but nobody takes much interest in it. It is in the hands of the lawyer of the late Baronet of Llanina."

"You mean one of the Prichards?" asked Gareth, his interest stimulated.

"Well, yes—Sir Ivor. I was a youth on his estate here. It is not entailed like the Llanina property. I am paid by the lawyer, and indeed so are all of us on this land. Some say that one day it will be sold up for some charity, but I am not sure indeed."

"It is a fine vale," said Gareth. "Strange I have never been this way before, but it is a long walk from my home."

"I thought every boy for miles round knew the legend of Plas Twm?"

"I know that all right," Gareth answered. "I wonder if the lawyer would give me a job on the land? I should like to work down there." He felt that he could not concentrate. He must do something, some physical employment that would help to rid him of his despair, until he held himself well under control again.

"Well, well, a nice chap is Mister Gwyn Vaughan."

"Will you do me a good turn and tell him about me?" Gareth asked, slipping half a crown into the toil-stained hand of the shepherd.

"Well, yes indeed, boy bach, anything you like whateffer."

Gareth searched in his pockets for a piece of paper, and he brought forth an envelope containing a letter, and he wrote thereon his name and address, and he said:

"Ask him if he will give me a job. I can turn my hand to anything." A smile crossed his strained features. "I am anxious about it—I am going to be married."

"Well, I'll do my best," the old shepherd promised.

Gareth watched his new friend pass down the hill.

"My uncle can cast me out when I am twenty-one," he thought to himself bitterly, "but he won't cast me out of Wales or part me from Mervee."

CHAPTER XVI

MORVYDD'S SECRET

In silence Mervee walked back to the Priory with her father. His pride was wounded He imagined that every man who touched his hat and every woman who dropped a curtsey mocked him, leered at him.

"You see, they laugh at us. You have dragged the name of Prichard in the dust."

Mervee remained silent. She saw no mockery in the eyes that met hers; she was not even conscious of curiosity; and she certainly did not care. What she had done she would do a thousand times, she told herself defiantly. She had saved Gareth. She triumphed that the chance had come to her so promptly. She was gratified that Llio knew, and Sir Islwyn and Howel,

that she was prepared to face all manner of opposition to wed the man of her heart.

As for Sir Islwyn, when he said that he was going to send Mervee away he meant it. Already at his request Howel had written to Lady Mari Wynne asking if she would give the heiress of Llanina a month in town during the season. "Hope you will be decent," wrote Howel; "she's too utterly sweet, and the Prichards are frightfully good to me. Sir Islwyn is keen on an early marriage for Mervee, because, as you know, he is a widower. He has no womenfolk; therefore he asked me to say that he would take it as no end of a favour if you would do the fairy godmother stunt to his daughter."

On reaching the Priory Mervee escaped to her room, but she heard her father shouting after her:

"You understand, you do not go out of the Priory without my permission."

She refused to leave her room that day, and so her meals were brought up to her. From her tower she looked down upon the fair world, and she remembered an old Welsh legend. . . . It was the story of a maid who was imprisoned in a tower. Her lover waited for a sign from her, beneath the ivy-covered battlement. A letter fluttered to his feet, albeit it was written with the blood of the love-sick maid. . . .

The following day Mervee received a message that her father wished to speak to her. He was seated in the library. He had not passed a very profitable twenty-four hours—moreover, the spirit of compromise was troubling him. He had received a telegram, couched in flowery terms, from Howel's aunt which gave him intense satisfaction.

Lady Mari Wynne, having dipped into *Debrett*, assured herself of Mervee's position as heiress to Sir Islwyn, and she had approved. Excellent alliance for the dear boy—for thus she thought of the intriguing Howel! It was amazing how he managed to hoodwink women into believing that he was "a splendid fellow." Mervee was

the only one who had seen through him, consequently, even had she not been Sir Islwyn's daughter, it is possible he would have had some desire to possess her! Accustomed to woman's flattery, Mervee's scorn and contempt, and her infatuation for the other man, whipped his passion to white heat. If there was one thing which he hated upon the face of the earth it was the octagon tower, that grim ruin in which love flourished. If he could destroy it, so that it could no more become the sheltered rendezvous of secret lovers, what a joy it would be to him. The obsession grew. He brooded upon it when he was awake and was distressed by it in his dreams. . . .

And Mervee. . . .

"You sent for me?" Sir Islwyn looked up at the sound of her voice.

"I have come," said she.

Vaguely he wondered if it was her white dress that made her look so ill, but the next moment he noted the defiant expression upon her set features, and he became hard and tyrannical.

"For the last twenty-four hours," he commenced abruptly, "I have been waiting for an apology, but so far you have not favoured me with one. Explain your conduct."

"I have nothing to explain," she answered tremulously. "You have insulted Llio, who has been good to me, and Gareth, whom I love."

"For God's sake, stop that nonsense," Sir Islwyn cried. "I hoped that you had learnt wisdom, but you are as foolish as a sentimental schoolgirl."

"Possibly."

"Anyway, you leave this house to-morrow. Howel is taking you up to Lady Mari Wynne. You are lucky to have a month in town during the season."

Disturbed by her silence, Prichard said tentatively:

"Well, what have you got to say on the subject? Here is a cheque for a hundred pounds—deuce of a

difficulty to squeeze it just now. Anyway, here it is. Now buy yourself some new togs—decent ones, as befits my daughter—and take your riding-kit. Howel's been asked for a fortnight. Lady Mari is going to mount you. You'll get some fine riding in the park."

But still Mervee did not speak.

"Whatever is the matter with you? Have you lost your tongue?"

"I shall not go to Lady Mari. I will not go with Howel Gwine across the road, much less will I travel with him or ride in the park. Father, don't you see you are destroying me?"

"By prohibiting your intrigue with an impecunious bounder at Carreg Ina. I'm afraid I cannot agree with you, my dear. Howel has his bad points. Find me a man who is without them. I'm talking of the real thing now, not the effeminate article in suede shoes. Howel is the man whom I have chosen for your husband, and the sooner you accept that fact the better."

"I shall not go to London."

"I insist."

"I shall not go!"

The two faced one another, father and child, each dominated by the same emotions, directed from different angles. She turned swiftly and left him. The great nail-studded hall doors were open.

Instinctively she knew where she would find Gareth. She guessed that the octagon tower would hold all the fascination for him that it held for her. She sped swiftly across the moor, and she pushed the branches of the trees aside. Within there was a man; he turned, and Howel faced her.

"Hello, what luck for me!" But although his words rang true, there was something furtive about his appearance which gave her a curious qualm of apprehension. "You have found a lover all right," he grinned sardonically, "but not the one you sought, eh, girl fach?" he added, mimicking Gareth. "Come and sit down."

Mervee hesitated, but the next moment, to his intense surprise, she slid down by his side.

"By jove, this is ripping, my dear." He bent towards her.

"You can never be my lover," said Mervee quietly. "And it is certain you are not my friend. You tried to injure Gareth Elys, and your miserable plot failed. Your aunt has invited you to stay with her for a fortnight. I am also to be a guest. You should run a marriage bureau instead of horse-jumping contests. I am sure you would excel at it. I am not going to London. Ask your aunt to keep you there. You will be safer under her care than mine."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"I cannot tell you—I do not know. I have said all that is in my mind."

He turned towards her appealingly.

"Suppose I confess that I have been a rotter. There are crowds of men knocking about like me—not one bit better—but when they meet the right sort of girl they settle down, and make the right sort of husband. If you'll give me a chance, before Heaven, I'll turn over a new leaf!"

Mervee shook her head.

"I have heard it said that it is a stupid thing for a girl to marry a man because she wants to reform him. Anyway, I do not feel inclined to risk the experiment."

"I'll make you!"

He caught her roughly to him and, abandoning his last remnant of self-control, he kissed her mouth. . . .

"This tower has been a curse to me," he cried. "It is here that you and he have met. Mervee, have mercy on me, I love you madly, desperately. . . ."

She struggled to free herself, she tried to call for help . . but no sound came . . . She was exhausted, half-fainting. Suddenly someone leapt across the dry moss and took the passion-driven man by the back of his neck. With a cry Howel let go his hold on Mervee.

She covered her face with her hands, bitterly humiliated, bitterly distressed . . . darkness fell upon her.

"This is not the time for me to settle my account," Gareth said to Howel. . . . He took Mervee in his arms as if she were a small child. To avoid curious eyes he carried his precious burden down the steep slopes on to the beach. He climbed a path that led to a sheltered cove, until he came to a little gate which led to Carreg Ina. . . .

Lisi met him in the hall, and a great cry burst from her

"Oh, Gareth bach, she is not drowned?" Llio heard the cry in his study, and he came forth, dazed and stupefied.

"No harm has come to Mervee?" he asked. He had not spoken six words to his nephew since the night of the quarrel.

"I found her with that blackguard Howel," said Gareth hoarsely. "You can do what you like with me, but you cannot refuse to shelter her."

"Take her up into Morvydd's room," said Llio, "and make a bed for Gareth on the sofa in my study, when night comes."

For two days Mervee was ill. The local doctor pronounced that she was suffering from shock and overstrain.

"Girls are very excitable at this age sometimes," he declared, "especially if there is a little love-affair brewing in the air."

The doctor was not unacquainted with the gossip of Llanina—that the minister's nephew was in love with Sir Islwyn Prichard's daughter.

"Shocking row there has been, too," it was whispered by the busybodies.

That night Llio made his way to the Priory, accompanied by Teivi, and Teivi waited in the luxurious grounds whilst Llio Elys was shown into the squire's library. Sir Islwyn was reading a book when the butler

announced the preacher. He looked haggard and worn; his face was lined as if he had not slept.

"I suppose you have come to tell me that my daughter has left me for ever, and that she is marrying your nephew."

"Your daughter is ill," Llio answered gravely. "Gareth carried her from the tower to Carreg Ina. You received my letter; I asked you to come and see her; you stayed away."

Sir Islwyn bit his moustache.

"I heard that your nephew behaved like a ruffian. There is nothing more for me to do. I have tried to save Mervee. Between you two my daughter has been compromised. I presume your nephew will marry her, and that is the end of it; but, of course, if she takes this fatal step I will not see her again."

"Your daughter's name is as white as snow," said Llio, with great dignity. "You know that I was greatly opposed to her coming to Carreg Ina without your consent. My nephew is a straight and manly fellow."

Sir Islwyn tapped the top of his writing-table with impatient fingers.

"Let him come to you and speak for himself," urged Llio.

"What was his father?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean?"

Llio told his story, and Sir Islwyn listened attentively. It angered him. It made things all the more difficult.

"You knew most of this long ago," said Llio. "It was not necessary to show my wounds again."

"But you admit that you do not know who this man's father is. You admit that you have never had any proofs of a marriage. I am greatly to be pitied, Llio Elys. My daughter was my pride—my ambition."

Llio did not answer. He turned, and was about to leave, when Sir Islwyn said:

"Very well, I'll oblige you. I will see this man, your nephew. I will reason with him. I will ask him to leave the county for twelve months. If he is still of the same mind when he returns—if he believes that Mervee is necessary to his life—and if she too is still anxious to make a fool of herself, I will say nothing against it."

"To-morrow night he shall be with you," Llio answered; "and then we will decide what is best for your daughter."

Sir Islwyn ignored the remark, for he thought: "When I get that nephew of his to myself, I will offer him £200 to get out of the country, and £200 a year for every year he keeps out of it."

Thus it came to pass that fate and circumstance decreed that Mervee should spend Gareth's twenty-first birthday beneath the roof of Carreg Ina. She was downstairs again, and she sat at Llio's table looking out upon the sun-kissed bay. It was beautiful, it was peaceful. She sighed impatiently. Oh, why would they not leave her alone to marry the man of her heart!

At six o'clock Gareth had decided to open the lacquer box.

"I will set it upon that desk, Mervee dear," said he. "My uncle shall sit on my left, and you on my right. But no one shall look over my papers and read with me, not even you, pet fach. For the words that my mother has written are sacred. You shall read them after I have done so. And then I will go to your father and say: 'Now that I know who I am, I ask for the hand of your daughter.'"

They both laughed, and Llio, hearing their laughter, sought refuge from his forebodings, and little laughing lines appeared around his eyes.

At last came the magic hour; and, just as Gareth had said, Llio sat on his left and Mervee on his right. Gareth broke the seal, and, placing the key in the lock, he took forth the paper whereon his mother had written. His body became rigid as he read:

"Gareth, my son, I do not know if you will ever read these lines. I do not know if I shall ever see Carreg Ina again when I leave it to-night. I am going out to meet him, your father. If he grants my request this letter will be destroyed on my return. If it is not destroyed you will know that I took my fate into my own hands and ended my life. One day after your uncle had gone to America for a season, I climbed the cliff above Carreg Ina. I crossed the moors and came to the tower that is of a queer round shape, and there I met the man who altered my life. . . ."

CHAPTER XVII

BITTERNESS

GARETH'S hands trembled when he read the tragic lines penned by his mother. He glanced furtively at Llio; his face was lit up with rapturous expectancy. The weary years of waiting were ended, and the day had dawned! The truth was to be revealed. Mervee, pale as the snowdrops in the woods, her little chin resting on her hands, was as quiet as a young bird basking in the sunshine. She was glad of her great decision to remain at Carreg Ina. . . .

Gareth was under the control of an invisible power. Something stronger than himself forced him to blot out everything from his memory but that of a mother whom he had never seen. Llio was dead, Mervee no longer existed, as he read the burning words of self revelation.

"The old sensation passed over me of which I have often read in books," Morvydd wrote. "It seemed as if I had been waiting for this man all my life. He was like nobody else in the world. He was tall and well

built. His eyes were dark brown and penetrating, his hair was as black as coal, his teeth white, his lips—oh! they were made for a woman's kisses. Did I tell you that he was on horseback, and the name of his horse was Cymry. He jumped down and allowed the mare to graze. He asked me if I lived at Llanina. I replied, 'Well, yes indeed, I am Morvydd the preacher's sister.' He searched me through and through with his great dark eyes, and at last he spoke. 'I have wondered what you were like. I have been told that Llio the bard's sister is the most beautiful girl in Wales. It is true!' I felt the colour rising to my face. 'Well, indeed, I am not beautiful,' I answered. 'I am a good judge,' the man retorted, with a gay laugh. He bent over my hand and kissed it, just as I had read in old days that in such a fashion a man treated his lady-love, and then we talked. . . . I was lonely, Llio was far away, and here was someone who begged to share my loneliness. 'Now let us play a game,' said he. 'I am the Black Knight, and you are the Maid of the Sea. Here is our tower, our trysting-place.' Day after day I met my Black Knight, and day after day he set out to woo his Maid of the Sea. I did not tell Llio of these meetings. I knew they would worry him. I worshipped my lover . . . and he? If I did not go to the trysting-tower, a note would reach me; and thus he would write: 'Why did you not come to-day, Morvydd fach. I waited for an hour, and Cymry pawed the earth and snorted. He knew my despair, and he rubbed his head against my shoulder, and I said: 'Some damned old whim has kept her, but we can't get along without her, can we, Cymry?' 'No, no, I cannot get along without you, Morvydd. Come to your Cariad at sunset, in the tower.' I could not resist him; I wanted him always. He became dearer than life, than Wales, than God. He was my all, my joy and my sorrow, the fruit of the earth and all the sweetness thereof. He was made for me too. He would

loosen my hair and hold the long curls against his nostril, and vow that its perfume was even as the breath of heaven. And poems, too, he would read to me—poems that fell from his lips like molten gold. Molten gold that fell upon my heart. And to me he would say : ' Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love,' thus he whispered to me. And then he asked me if I considered the world well lost for love. ' Tell me now,' I said, ' exactly what you mean by that.' He hesitated, but after a time he answered boldly. ' My race demands certain things from me—a marriage with one of my own class. A loveless marriage would be hell to me. In my youth I made a fool of myself, but fate intervened and freed me from the yoke.' ' You love me,' I said, ' you love me, but I am not good enough for a wife—that is what you are saying. Well, then, indeed,' I cried, ' you are not good enough for a husband.' I tore away from him, blind with rage. I made my way across the beach, and I returned home . . . to the room that is mine at Carreg Ina. All night I heard him pace up and down beneath my window—heard his cry, ' Morvydd, for God's sake, come down.' I fought with myself, for his dear voice set my blood a-tingling. His words hammered in my brain : ' Do you consider the world well lost for love ? ' What was the world without him ? What was life ? I tried to think of the days when I heard not his voice. The nights which held no future for the morrow. Dawn found me on my knees beside my bed, and Lisi lifted me up and covered me with the eiderdown quilt. ' Whateffer is the matter, little mistress fach ? ' cried she ; but to her questioning I was dumb. Then came the usual note. ' If you do not come out and thrash things out with me, I will stride right into Carreg Ina and force you to see me there. You cannot put this barrier between us,' he wrote, ' unless you wish me to believe that your kisses are those of a wanton ? ' I

found those bold words sweeter than the scents of Lebanon. Still I fought, but when night came I crept out and found him waiting at the tower. He gave a hoarse cry of joy when he saw me, a cry that startled the sea-birds and set them fluttering around us as if it were day. 'Morvydd, Morvydd.' His voice caressed me; his arms were strong. 'You shall have your way, my love,' he cried. 'We will be married secretly; but do not give my name away until your brother returns. . . . I was dumb with joy. Invisible hosts seemed to dance before me, and beckon me through the Gateway of Enchantment which leads to the consummation of perfect love. . . . You were born in a wonderful old place that belonged to my beloved, a house he seldom used. A month after your birth he changed. He was bitter, cruel, whimsical. My beauty faded, shrivelled up beneath his callousness. One day he told me that I was not his wife, that I had better go back to Carreg Ina, and say that my husband had gone abroad. 'The indiscretion of his youth'—he laughed mockingly, 'had turned up.' I came home, but my soul was dead. I tried to hide my agony. I took you in my arms and cooed you to sleep with a lullaby of my very own.

In the shelter of my heart, love,
At the gateway of my soul,
Sleep and rest my little Gareth,
Mother's darling, mother's own. . .

And I wondered how I could face Llio. What could I say to him? He a saint without sin? What did he know of love?—of passion, of the supreme intoxicating joy of being flesh of one flesh, bone of one bone with the adored. One day a letter came to me from Llio. I know every word of it by heart. 'I am longing to see you, Morvydd,' he wrote. 'I have often tried to picture the type of man whom you would

marry. Of course he is tall and fine, and manly and upright, like my sister, pure in heart like my Morvydd.' Pure in heart! Would those words be ever blotted from my memory! I wrote to him whom I loved. 'I must see you to-morrow night, Cariad. Have I not some small right to say: Come to me? Llio will be home in two days, and I am afraid. For weeks I have been haunted by the thought of his eyes—those blind eyes. It is as if the loss of his sight has added to the keen perceptions of his mind. He will read my secret. Sometimes I feel that I must tell him the truth. Your coldness makes me mad; my blood becomes a tormenting fire. . . .' I will plead with him to-night. Passion cannot die so completely that not one spark remains to fan the flame. I have not wronged you intentionally, my little baban. I have carried you up to my room. You are smiling in your sleep as I write these lines. I have told Lisi to take care of you, and, if I don't come back, I shall of a truth be the Maid of the Sea. I shall end my grief in the waters of Llanina. If this comes to pass, study these words. I have suffered. I am driven forth, hunted to my death. If I return not to Carreg Ina, and my body is found on the bosom of the sea, curse him who destroyed me, and those who bear his name . . . the Prichards of Llanina. Let these words sink into your brain—they come from my breaking heart. Remember always that Sir Ivor Prichard was the man who sent me to my doom. . . ."

The document ended abruptly. Gareth did not move. He was a stricken, wounded thing—a poor, nameless thing. The bitterness surged upon him, and with the bitterness came the memory of the proud boast that he would go to Sir Islwyn and say, "I am the son of——" His face flushed. Sir Ivor Prichard was his father, and his mother had been driven to her death, and the wrong could not be righted. He was just Morvydd's son, her

nameless son—and her bequest was a hatred for the Prichards. And Mervee. . . . He dared not look at her. He was conscious of her startled gaze, when he felt her cold hand on his, and heard her sweet, sympathetic voice :

" Oh, Gareth darling, I fear the lacquer box was full of sorrow instead of joy. Don't trouble, my dear. What does it matter as long as I have you and you have me ? "

He looked steadfastly into her troubled face, into the face of the girl he loved and whom henceforth he must for ever blot out of his life. . . .

Llio's voice broke the silence.

" I'm impatient, my boy. Very, very impatient. Who was the lucky man who married my Morvydd ? "

Like a hunted animal Gareth found himself at bay, and then he turned to Mervee. Her eyes were filled with tears, her lips quivered :

" I understand. You wish to be alone. I should feel just the same had such a letter come from my mother, after all these years."

She got up from the chair, and, although she tried to turn an awkward situation into a natural one, she thought : " Gareth knows how close I am to him, that my heart-beat is his heart-beat, my desire his desire. He will not mind my remaining by his side whilst he goes on dreaming of her. I am to share his life." In spite of her words, she expected him to seize her hands in the old familiar, half-playful manner. She expected to hear his glad, reassuring tones. . . . " The past is past, pet lamb . . . you and you alone for me."

But he did not speak. She went quietly from the room. Llio's sensitive nature gauged the horror and the drama of the situation. He was glad that Mervee had left them alone. Dear as she was to him, Morvydd was dearer. He was pleased that Gareth was deeply moved by her letter, and yet. . . . He felt uneasy ; he knew, although he tried to cheat himself into another belief,

that something was wrong. With a sudden outburst of pent-up longing he cried :

" Speak ! What are you keeping back from me ? Tell me the name of your father. Where were they married ? I have promised Sir Islwyn that you will go to him to-night and tell him the truth."

" I shall not go ! "

" You mean—you mean ? " Llio's voice was hoarse with emotion.

" That whatever my mother's secret was I share with her and with her alone ! " And even as he spoke he tore the closely written documents into small pieces. Leaning across the table he drew a brass ash-tray nearer to him, struck a light, and set fire to the paper. He watched the flames spring up and die away, until only the ashes remained of Morvydd's story of passion. . . .

It was a long time before Llio asked his question :

" She wasn't married ? You have discovered that—a man—killed her ? "

Gareth's voice broke.

" Drove her out upon the rocks—into the sea. She destroyed herself because of him—my mother. Oh, God ! how I hate the race from whence he came." And then there was silence—silence broken at last by Gareth's hard, dry sobs.

" Morvydd ! " Llio was muttering half to himself. " Morvydd, and no one at hand to comfort her. Terrible, terrible ! Every Sunday I stand in my pulpit and I preach of the love of God, and I say, ' Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.' A woman is stricken, and in all Llanina there is no one to comfort her. Of a truth have I failed to serve Christ. I was in America furthering my own career, and Morvydd had no one to whom she could turn for sympathy and help."

Gareth had no more to say to him. Llio's grief concerned him not, inasmuch as his own sorrow was a burden more difficult than he could bear.

The door opened quietly, and Mervee entered. She looked at the two men, and for a moment she found it difficult to speak.

"You make me feel very unhappy," she said at last, stroking Gareth's dark head with a trembling hand. "You treat me as a stranger. I walked up and down in the garden. I thought you would come to me. You make me feel like the woman at the outer gate—not like the woman in the inner courts of your heart. Tell me I am wrong, boy bach," she begged—"tell me that all this is an idle fancy——"

But still Gareth did not speak. He was dazed, stupefied. And then the Prichard pride and the Prichard temper flared up.

"Oh, do you mean you care so little after all, that you would allow a letter from the dead make you dumb, when I am here alive?"

"Oh, you Prichards!" cried Gareth bitterly. "You are cynical, utterly cynical—lords of the earth, gods of creation! We must weep when you weep, laugh when you laugh, even though our hearts be broken. Your father would have me at Llanina Priory, so that he could sit in judgment on me."

"Are you telling me to go back to him?" Mervee asked.

"My dear," Llio interposed piteously. "Do not take any notice of him now. Don't you understand he is troubled; he is highly strung?" He put out his hands towards her entreatingly.

"What can I do?" asked Mervee.

Llio placed his arm through hers, and he took her into the little hall. "I am going to take you home," he said quietly. "Gareth is not well."

"If that is true, I cannot leave him."

"Ill in mind, not in body," Llio answered quietly. "I gave my word that Gareth should see your father to-night. He cannot go. Therefore, until he is able to do so, it is my wish that you remain under the

guardianship of your father. When Gareth is himself again all the locks and bolts of old Cambria will not keep him from you."

In silence they made their way along the white road, Mervee hugging Llio's right arm. In his left hand he carried a stick, a trusty friend that helped him to find his way at night.

They passed up the wide drive which skirted the park.

"You will come in with me?" she faltered. "I cannot bear to go alone. . . . You will tell him just what you told me?"

"Yes, yes, I will tell him," Llio replied, for even in his agonised state of mind, he realised the bitter pain it must give Mervee, to return to the Priory in this humble fashion.

The butler told Mervee in answer to her question that Sir Islwyn was in the library. She led the way across the hall, and she paused at the door.

"Shall I tell him you are here?"

"Well, yes, perhaps it would be better," Llio answered quietly.

The next moment Mervee found herself with her father. He was at his desk, the light from a reading-lamp fell upon the open pages of his book. He was not reading. There was a frown on his features; his gold hunter watch was placed by the open book, as if he had grown tired of taking it in and out of his pocket. At the sound of a footstep he turned, and he stared hard at Mervee for a few moments without opening his lips, and at length he said:

"So he was afraid to come by himself? Bring him in."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"That highly romantic lover of yours," snapped Sir Islwyn. "I consented last night to his coming here and speaking for himself. I did not intend that you should be present. I understood from that old humbug Elys that he would come alone. Naturally I was just a little

surprised that my daughter favoured her own home with a visit."

"Gareth is not here!"

"Tired of his bargain?"

The girl winced, and a flood of warm colour dyed her face scarlet. She put her hand upon the handle of the door, and Llio stood before the baronet.

"I have brought your daughter back to you," said he in a low, troubled voice. "My nephew could not come."

"Dare not, I presume you mean," Sir Islwyn exclaimed angrily.

"My nephew fears no man," Llio replied, "but he was unable to come to-night, and because of this I have brought your daughter back to you, until that day when he comes for his bride." Turning to Mervee, he added: "Remember that a Welshman is at his best when his back is against the wall fighting, and a Welsh-woman has proved more than once that she is at her best when the odds are dead against her. This is the way to win the day for yourself and for your lover."

They heard his stick tap the floor as he made his way across the hall. The sounds died away, and Sir Islwyn turned and faced his daughter with the faintest smile of triumph upon his haggard features.

"So he tired of you?"

"Yes," Mervee answered quietly, "he tired of me." And she fell, sobbing, at his feet.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STORM

Llio did not return to Carreg Ina. He walked on towards the mountains that towered like grim phantoms above the valley.

Have you ever felt the moon has lost its light, the sun its warmth, the stars their diamond, scintillating beauty? That the birds were out of tune, the flowers colourless, the earth a chill tomb of discontent? Llio experienced all this when he led the heiress of Llanina home, and tried to comfort her by weak, insincere words that mocked him even as he spoke. Morvydd, Morvydd, the beautiful flower of Carreg Ina, had been trampled on, besmirched, ruined, deserted . . . lost for eternity! He could not bear Carreg Ina that night. For years had it not been the pleasant archway of his dreams? Had he not been proud of Gareth, Morvydd's son? Gareth the nameless! His features twitched as he strode along, tapping the earth with his stick as he walked.

The path he chose was steep, and each side there were walls of loose stones placed one on the other. Here and there ivy and bramble-bushes had sprung into being, and they flourished through weak spaces in the stonework. A caravan was drawn up in a field near the pathway; a group of gipsies loitered there. A man was seated on the steps playing a concertina. An old hag lay on the stubble smoking a short clay pipe; wisps of grey hair showed beneath her gaily coloured kerchief in the moonlight. Two or three gipsy youths were playing pitch-and-toss. They paused for a moment as Llio made his way along the rugged, elevated breast that led him to his favourite mountain.

Why was the mountain dear to him? It was precipitous, steep, and treacherous on the right, undulating and easy of ascent on the left, and this was the way that was known to Llio. At the top there were two great stones placed one upon another, rocking stones, relics of druidical worship and human sacrifice on that bleak mountain-side. Here played the winds of heaven. Here on many a moonlight night Llio had knelt in prayer, or when the noonday sun was in the heavens he had

penned his poems. He had stretched himself upon the sun-kissed earth and pictured the glories of the world that were before him, albeit they were hidden from his sight. Sometimes he would raise his voice and sing. But to-night as he stumbled onward there was no relief to the greyness of his mind. For once in his life he had given way to a selfish desire to be alone. He had left Gareth to his sorrow. He groped with his stick until he touched the rocking stones. Three paces brought him up against them, his old friends the grey stones. Had they not sheltered him from the glare of the sun when he lay prone beneath their shadow? Had they not sheltered him and kept him warm and snug when the whistling wind had swept ruthlessly from the east, or when an April shower blotted out the landscape? There was a little niche in the rocks that Llio loved. To-night the friendly grey stones had become the altar of his despair. He stood upright with his back against the rocks, his head bared to the heavens, when a distant rumble of thunder echoed in the mountain recesses.

"The anger of God," he muttered piteously, "the anger of God against the evildoer. Of a truth there is one who is made to pay the price, and there is one who is free. One the scapegoat; and for the other the fatted calf."

Great drops of rain fell on his upturned face. Storms in the wild, mountainous districts move quickly. The clouds march across the firmament like an avenging army. They are massed together in an impenetrable, sable bank. The radiance of the moon fades into darkness. There is a silence. . . . The battle opens. Thunder rumbles and crashes, and the zig-zag of vivid lightning turns night into a riotous jazz that mocks the solitude of the hills and pries into the secret places of the earth. The storm broke suddenly. Llio, momentarily taken off his guard, stretched forth his hand for his stick, but the whirlwind had made sport of the gnarled and twisted piece of wood.

For a moment he was horror-stricken ; he found himself muttering :

> " My heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place.
> Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the
> Sound that goeth out of his mouth.
> He directeth it under the whole heaven, and
> His lightning unto the ends of the earth. . . .
> God thundereth marvellously with His voice ;
> Great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend."

He paused. The lightning played on his quivering features, and he cried out :

" Have I not served Thee faithfully ? Have I not walked in the narrow path ? And in the day-time Thou didst lead me with the cloud of Thy love, and in the night-time Thou becamest a light of fire—and now——" Tears mingled with the rain on his face. He lifted up his hands, and a great cry burst from him. " Thou hast taken my Morvydd ; even as a sacrifice were her youth and beauty destroyed upon the altar of a worthless love. But the wind passeth and cleanseth her. Oh, God, give me a sign ! Give me a sign that I may see the glory of Thy name, and I will go forth to save the broken and to heal those from whom hope hath fled. . . ."

As the intensity of the storm increased, even so to greater intensity did Llio pray.

" A sign ! A sign ! " he cried, beating his knuckles upon his black, rain-soaked coat and lifting his sightless eyes to the storm-driven skies. " My sight, beloved Christ, my sight ! " he groaned. " God thundereth marvellously with his voice ; great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend."

It was then that lightning zig-zagged across the rock upon Llio's tortured features. Like a tree that is uprooted and cast down by the storm, so he fell forward on his face. . . .

It was six o'clock the next morning that Lisi gave Teivi a push with her stout arm and said :

" Strange happenings came into my mind when I slept last night."

" Oh, oh," chuckled Teivi, " like a log you was for sure, Lisi fach. The little old bed did rock with the storm ; but if Carreg Ina fell down upon us, you would not know a single thing about it for certain sure. And when I heard the storm so bad," he yawned. " ' well, dear me, said I, shocking will it be for me to go out with the mackerel boats. Little cold in my head is a troublesome thing. Nice drop of something hot will do me good to-night.' "

" Tut, tut," Lisi retorted, drawing her thick scarlet petticoat over her head, " we will see what the cold is like to-night before I make any rash promises."

Teivi hastened to make the kitchen fire, and, when the water had boiled in the kettle, Lisi made tea. She poured some into a cup, and, placing it upon a tray, she set forth to her master's room. . . . The bed was empty, and she cried aloud :

" Master Gareth, wherever is your uncle ? " . . . No sound came from Gareth's room. Greatly puzzled, Lisi set down the tray, and she went to the study.

" Making one of his sermons," she thought anxiously. Llio was not there ; but Gareth was asleep in the minister's chair. His arms were stretched out upon the table, his dark head buried in his arms.

" Gareth," Lisi cried out shrilly, her maternal instinct rising in protest at this strange sight. " Have you not been to bed, boy bach—and wherever is your uncle ? " She shook him roughly by the shoulder, for he was in a deep sleep and she found it difficult to awaken him. He lifted up his head, and when Lisi saw his tear-stained features she forgot the preacher. . . . Her arm was slipped under Gareth's head, just as she used to do when he was a tiny baban and she had cooed him to sleep as if she were his own mother.

" Whatever is the matter," she cried ; and then her eyes wandered to the red lacquer box, and to the ashes

of Morvydd's letter. A chill passed over her, and she said in a low voice : " What is it ? "

" Tell me the truth about my mother ! "

Lisi became like a stone.

" Go on," Gareth muttered impatiently. " Tell me the truth, but no one else." . . . He suddenly seized her arm fiercely, and said, " I shall kill you—Lisi—if you don't tell me all you know."

Lisi fenced, and Gareth knew it. He had determined before he fell asleep in the preacher's chair, that at dawn, he would bring the old servant into the room and wrest the truth from her.

" Did she ever speak of my father ? "

" Oh, Master Gareth dear," Lisi cried, " many times did she speak of him."

" Go on," said Gareth harshly. " You were with her day after day. Was she happy ? "

" Oh, it is a pity to look upon the past ! "

" Am I not the best judge of that ? " said Gareth harshly. " Answer me. She was like all girls, happy girls, happy mothers—singing about the house as she worked ? "

" Sometimes," Lisi muttered, " I saw tears in her eyes when she sang you to sleep with ' At the shelter of my heart, love '—her own lullaby for you, boy bach. One day I saw your father's photograph. I thought it fine."

" Go on," said Gareth hoarsely.

" ' Oh, mistress fach,' I cried out, ' he's splendid.' And I was just going to say he is like Sir Ivor Prichard when she became very angry. ' How dare you spy upon me,' she said. ' If you do it again I'll send you right away for sure.' ' I was not spying, little mistress,' said I. ' There is nothing I would not do for you.' ' Then hold your tongue, and do your work,' she cried. I remember as if it were only yesterday." . . . Lisi wiped her eyes with the corner of her blue-checked apron.

" More, more ! " cried Gareth. " Tell me all you know. Tell me about the last time you saw her ! "

" I had been out with Teivi—we were courting then—and when I got back to Carreg Ina Miss Morvydd was singing you to sleep. She had been crying. She was kneeling beside the oak cradle, rocking it gently to and fro as she sang." . . . Haltingly Lisi told him all that she knew of his mother's story. " Well, indeed, I shall never forget the morning before she left us. I was frizzling some rashers of bacon for breakfast, feeling very happy whateffer," Lisi went on tremulously. " When Miss Morvydd came down into the kitchen with you in her arms she said : ' *Bora da* (good-morning), Lisi. You are happy ? ' And when I looked at her, boy bach, she seemed ill, as if she had not been to bed, just like you look now," Lisi went on, with a break in her voice. " And I tried to comfort her. ' Well, yes indeed,' said I, ' we are only here for a short time, I think to myself, so what's the good of worrying about any old thing. . . . The baban looks well this morning, and to-morrow the master will be here. I am going to polish every blessed bit of brass and pewter until I can see my ugly face in them.' I'll cheer her up to-day, thought I, even if my little old tongue drops out of my mouth, . . . To-morrow the master will be home, and then she'll be all right for sure. . . "

CHAPTER XIX

THE MIRACLE

GARETH did not move whilst he was dragging the pitiless story of his mother's fate from Lisi. His eyes were closed. The black eyelashes made a dark line upon his white skin. His attractive healthy bronzed colouring had vanished as if by magic.

" Go on—go on—oh, don't you see, I must know everything—the best, the worst——"

He dragged the story from her word by word. At last the narrative ended in a sob.

"And that is all?"

"Well. yes," said Lisi, "that is all I know. The past is past. This is to-day, and the master is missing."

Dazed and broken, Gareth sprang to his feet.

"There is nothing but misery for Carreg Ina," he groaned. "Have I not had enough to bear without his wandering into the storm like a foolish sheep?"

Lisi went to the top of the stairs, and she cried out in a loud voice to Teivi, who was heard breaking firewood across his knees: "I cannot find the master!"

"He went out with Miss Mervee," Teivi observed, scratching his head with his finger, a favourite trick of his when he was worried. He wandered about the garden, seeking favoured spots that were frequented by his master, but his search was all in vain. When he came back into the house he found Gareth and Lisi together in the kitchen.

"Whatever shall we do?" cried Lisi. "We cannot find him anywhere!"

"He took Mervee away," Gareth repeated dully.

"That is all right," said Teivi. "When the master got to the Priory, Sir Islwyn would not let him come out into the storm. A man would not send his dog to the door on such a night. Fierce was the lightning."

"Tut, tut!" cried Lisi impatiently. "What indeed did you know about the lightning, sleeping like an old dog were you. Go to Llanina Priory and see if the master is there." Turning to Gareth, she added, "I will go down to the village. Hap he took shelter with some of the people of Nazareth. Go along the cliffs to the tower, Teivi. Fine shelter might be found there by a man who was caught in the storm."

"I cannot go to the Priory," Gareth exclaimed passionately.

"Mister Gareth, Mister Gareth, are you mad that you

will not help to find the master? Have I not said the past is dead," cried Lisi. "The dead lie in their graves but the living walk the earth."

"The past is never dead," Gareth protested as he passed out of the cottage. He did not care that his face was haggard and unwashed, his thick hair unkempt, his collar and tie disarranged, his boots covered with the dust of yesterday, his clothes unbrushed. The morning was bright, a keen wind came across the moors from the sea, but to-day a fair world only mocked the agony that was in his heart. As he walked across the moors, that once had been to him as fair as Paradise, he thought of his mother—his wonderful mother. Here her feet had trod. Here had her sighs ascended to the pitiless heavens, and there, like an old warrior guarding the sunlit coast, was the tower—the tower that held the secret of her moonlight madness—the secret of her passion for her "Black Knight." The tower that witnessed his love for Mervee, who was lost to him for ever. His features worked pitifully. He must hate her—loathe the sound of her voice, the sweetness of her face, the softness of her body. . . .

"God, let me die," he groaned. He stumbled over the heather like a man drunk with wine. At the lodge gates he came face to face with Howel. Howel was in a good humour. He was whistling a gay tune; but he stopped and stared hard at his rival, and his face whitened.

"Going to give me a thrashing?" he asked, with an attempt at carelessness. "I don't want to run away from you, but your visit is a little early——"

"Another time," Gareth retorted dully. "Is my uncle at the Priory?"

Howel grinned.

"I should hardly think so," he retorted. "Sir Islwyn has an objection to early morning visitors. But that is your affair. However, I thought you might like to take the hint. Besides, if you don't mind my saying so, you look as if you had spent the night at the 'Bluebell.'

But that is also your own affair. We know that Nonconformity is the happy hunting-ground of the hypocrite."

"And the Church," Gareth retorted bitterly, "has its black sheep." He strode along the drive. It was the first time that he had been to the Priory since that night, years ago, when he had sought Mervee. In his boyhood he had thought it a wonderful place. Its towers, its battlements, its great nail-studded door, its graceful archways were full of dignity and beauty. The grounds were a blaze of colour, for the gardens were sheltered from the wind.

"I have come for my uncle," Gareth explained to the butler, "Mr. Llio Elys."

"He is not here, sir."

"But he came last night?" Gareth was at last realising the cause of Lisi's distress. At first it had annoyed him. Llio the bard must be safe among his people, even if he wandered along the coast. There was not a door that would remain unopened to him. But suppose if he had been turned away from this place. His face grew ugly, vindictive. A house that could break his mother would have no mercy on a blind man. . . .

Someone ran across the hall, and he felt Mervee tugging at his sleeve and dragging him into one of the rooms that faced the sea Tears were in her eyes; her lips were tremulous

"Oh. my dear, my dear," she whispered. "Last night I felt that you had thrust me out of your life. My father was glad, and Howel—oh, yes, he thought we had quarrelled, for, not knowing what I was saying——"

He tried not to look upon her beauty. He tried to harden his heart and fill it with bitterness instead of love—passionate love. . . .

She put her head upon his shoulder, but he did not seek to caress her.

"Let us forget last night, my Cariad," she whispered. "That is the beauty of love—it knows not pride; and I forgive everything, heart of my heart."

No words fell from his lips, but a terrible question was throbbing in his brain. Is love stronger than hate?

Chilled and discouraged, Mervee stood away from him; and then for the first time she noted his dishevelled appearance.

"Oh, Gareth, trust me!"

"My uncle is missing. He did not sleep at Carreg Ina, and so I came to find him."

"Not to find me?" She could not suppress the cry, or hide the disappointment from her tones.

"No, a blind man," said Gareth harshly. "Did your father turn him adrift in the night?"

"What makes you so cruel to me? Do I not love Llio as if he were of my own blood? He brought me home and he went away. The storm had not broken over Llanina when he left. The night was clear and bright. Did I not look out from my window," Mervee went on anxiously, "and see the place wherein you and I had found happiness? I could not sleep, and when the storm came it seemed to me as if even God was angry."

Gareth turned aside.

"I must go up the mountain."

"I will come with you," Mervee pleaded. "You will let me come?"

"As you will!"

They passed out together along the rain-sodden drive. On reaching the lodge gates they turned to the right and made for the mountains. They walked in silence. A gipsy caravan came slowly towards them. Mervee knew the gipsies well by sight.

"We are looking for a man," she told them.

"An old man with white hair?" a gipsy woman asked. "We saw such a man go up the path towards the mountains last night. If he is still up there——" She paused. "You will not find him alive after such a storm."

Gareth and the girl pressed on, Mervee pale and agitated, Gareth sullen and silent; but a scarlet flush

on his high cheek-bone betrayed the fact that he was suffering from mental strain. They passed over an open space of moorland and by a small blue lake. Romance lurked in every crevice. In the treeless desolation there was majesty and beauty. They climbed through a narrow pass, high above a raging torrent that fell in glittering cascades from rock to rock. And Mervee looked down, and she suddenly cried out:

"Oh, Gareth, it is terrible if Llio came so far. Would he not fall?"

"If you are afraid of what you may find, go back," said he coldly.

She did not answer, but climbed on ahead; and now it was Gareth who followed her. . . .

With a curious sensation of cramp and cold, Llio awakened from what he believed to be a deep sleep.

"Just like me," he muttered to himself. "So much do I love these old mountains that I go to them as a stricken baban to his mother. On the warm breast of the earth I lay my head, and in the sweetness of the dew and in the mercy of the Almighty King I find healing."

With difficulty he got up. Sheltered by the great rock that was at the summit of the mountain, the rain had scarcely touched him. He caught at a jagged piece of stone and held on to it with a great cry—a cry of horror—for the first time in his life the fear of the perilous heights struck terror to his soul, and robbed his limbs of strength. Beneath him was the world, the world and all the glory therein. Vast buttresses of rock were around him, beneath deep hollows, and in each hollow glowed a sparkling jewel, a jewel that was a sunlit lake. The nearest was Ffynnon-Llas, or the green well; but even in sunshine this strange lake was as a black pearl set in an emerald, for the waters were dark and unfathomable, albeit the banks were a vivid green. Rugged hills were around, a great amphitheatre of Nature's handiwork. On one side reared the mighty Wyddfa, and Crib y Distyll, with its delicate, serrated rocks, the ridge of fiery redness,

Crib Coch, and near by the Lliwedd, and, beyond still another sharp ridge, Y Clawdd Coch ; and away in the distance showed the high hill of an English county. The Isle of Man and Anglesea lay like a raised map beneath him. Lake and rivulet glowed in the sunlight. Moel y Cynghorion—or the hill of the council—lakes and valleys, little rills and mountain streams, like silver chains intersecting the hollows around. The steep rocks of Clogwyn y Carnedd. Trees issuing out of rocky clefts looked like miniature Japanese gardens. And then Llio fell on his knees and covered his face with his hands, and great sobs shook his fine frame.

" Oh, my God," he cried. " A miracle—a miracle—I can see ! "

It was Mervee who heard his voice.

" Did you hear ? "

" The sound of a bird. Perhaps an eagle sweeping down upon its prey," Gareth answered.

No, it was Llio !

Convinced at last by her earnestness, Gareth found himself climbing by her side. They saw Llio kneeling by the stones ; they heard him praying aloud. Mervee ran to him and put her arms around him :

" I heard your cry, oh, Llio ! You are safe ! "

He looked up, speechless. There she was—the maid whom he had loved. He had often drawn imaginary pictures of her to himself ; but now that he looked upon her he was dumb. How could he know that a woman's eyes might be brighter than the gems which glorify the crown of a king ? How could he know that the red rose of summer is not more fragrant than a woman's lips. That her skin can mock the lily with its fairness, her teeth the sheen of pearls ? And then he saw Gareth. Was his hair not as black silk, his strength and suppleness even as a tree in the forest ?

He arose and faced them.

" I did not know that a woman was so fair, or a youth as a young stripling, or that the world was thus——"

And he pointed to the glories which surrounded him. "I did not know you were so wonderful, Mervee fach."

"He is ill, very ill—delirious," she muttered helplessly. "What has come to you? Why did you wander from Carreg Ina?"

"Why did I wander?" There was a tense pause. "I wanted to be alone. I made a bargain with God. 'Give me my sight,' I said, 'that I may go forth and preach a gospel of hope to those women who are as lost souls! Am I not as a bruised reed?' I said, 'Am I not of a truth one of the blind who leads the blind.' Henceforth, I vowed, I will go forth and preach of the mercy and love of God. And to the woman who is a sinner will I say, 'Seek ye the Lord, and touch but the hem of his garments, and your sin shall be whiter than snow.'"

Gareth, thinking that his sorrow about Morvydd had turned his brain, besought him to come from the perilous heights, for he knew if he took one false step no power on earth could save him. Moreover, he was afraid that in this unbalanced state of mind he might be lost to them for ever.

"How did you get here?" Mervee asked. "How could you come alone?"

"The Lord placed his hands beneath my feet and guided me hither," Llio answered. "And I was not satisfied with my guide. I wanted to choose my own path. I wanted my own way, albeit, when the lightning came, the words of Job fell from my lips:

> "God thundereth marvellously with his voice;
> Great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend,

and I cried out, 'Give me a sign.'"

"Uncle bach, come back now," Gareth pleaded. "Lisi and Teivi are searching Llanina for you."

Mervee took the preacher by the arm and said: "I will help you."

"Leave him alone," Gareth remonstrated sternly. "Although my uncle is blind, he can negotiate places that I fear to climb. Let him go on in his old way and he will be safe."

Gareth expected Llio to spring forward in his usual independent, energetic manner, but he stood helpless before them, afraid to move, clinging to the overhanging rock and crying out:

"I can see—and, lo! am I afraid. For now that I have eyes to see God hath taken his hands from beneath my feet."

Suddenly an arched, multi-coloured bow stretched forth across the heavens, and Llio's exalted tones rang forth into the morning air:

"And there was a rainbow round about the throne in sight like unto an emerald. . . ."

This was the sign given to Mervee and Gareth that sight had been given unto Llio.

CHAPTER XX

FALLING LEAF

THEY led Llio down the perilous slopes in safety. At Carreg Ina, Lisi and Teivi were filled with despair.

"Never shall we see the master bach again," she sobbed. By this time it was noised about Llanina that the minister was missing. Search-parties went out hither and thither like a pack of hounds chasing an elusive hare.

On reaching the gates of the Priory, Mervee said:

"I will go home now; but there are many things I wish to ask of you, Gareth. Things that I must ask you when we are alone."

Llio studied the man and girl. These two children, who

loved and quarrelled and quarrelled and loved, were irresistibly dear to him.

Gareth was torn by his emotions. And when Mervee bared her soul and trampled on her pride, he made up his mind that he would see her once again, once again, and then the end. . . .

"The tower?" she whispered. "To-night?"

"Yes."

At last Gareth and his uncle reached their home. Llio looked with wonder upon it.

"Boy bach, pleasant is the abode. The flowers in the garden of Llanina are beautiful to the eye, beautiful as their sweet scent."

He made his way to his study, and he went straight to his table that was set before the window, and he looked upon the face of the waters, on the quay, and upon the little village, and then he walked to the place where Morvydd's picture hung upon the wall. His face quivered, and he said in a low voice: "She was fair. Fair was my sister fach." Turning to Gareth, he added: "Will you not tell me his name?"

But, although Gareth was forcing the weed of hatred to grow in his heart, he did not wish the hatred of another to fall on Mervee.

"He will hate her, even as I hate her and all those who spring from her blood," Gareth reasoned. For the first time since the truth had been revealed to him, the old desire to protect her from sorrow swept over him.

"I am sorry," he answered, "but the secret is mine."

Soon after Lisi, followed by Teivi, came into the room.

"Oh, master bach," she cried, "never must you go forth alone at night."

Llio interrupted her.

"So you are the faithful Lisi," said he. "There are laughter lines around your eyes. Teivi is as brown as the sail out yonder in the bay."

Thus it was disclosed to these two who had served him so well through the long years, that their master was no

longer sightless. The news blazed forth throughout the length and breadth of Llanina that a miracle had been performed upon the dizzy heights of the mountain. Newspaper men came from the north and from the south, and many wrote to Llio, but in answer to all that questioned him came the same quiet answer :

" God made my eyes to see."

That night the vicar, Howel, the squire of a neighbouring village, Sir Emrys Pennant, his sister Dilys, and the Bishop of St. Asaph dined at the Priory. Mervee wore a scarlet frock ; it accentuated the fairness of her skin and the beauty of her hair. She listened to a lively discussion about the miracle of Carreg Ina. She heard it explained away by Sir Emrys Pennant, who in early youth had walked the wards of a London hospital, and he had much to say of nerves and shock. The vicar was non-committal. Dilys, a stout, well-built girl of twenty-five, was quite ready to relapse into a flirtation with Howel, but, as usual, he had only time for one woman when Mervee was present. To-night the scarlet dress made her more desirable than ever. When she rushed into an appointment with Gareth she had forgotten the dinner-party, although her father had said something about it to her the previous night. It was years since he had heard more gratifying words than those which were wrung out of Mervee's despair : " He has tired of me ! "

He dropped a hint to Howel.

" Now is your time to win my girl," he confided. " There is a good deal of truth in the old saying about catching love at the rebound."

Hence the sprightly manner in which Howel had set forth from the Priory when he met Gareth earlier in the day. But Mervee ignored him. She would never forgive him for his wild attack upon her on the night she had found him in the tower, although he had taken the very first opportunity to beg her pardon and to excuse himself by saying : " Love makes fools of all men. I was

miserable about you, and jealous, too, of that man at Carreg Ina. I admit I called in at the 'Bluebell.' I did have——"

"Oh, don't tell me any more about your vulgar habits," she cried impatiently, and left him.

Howel had told Sir Islwyn his own version of the adventure with Mervee in the tower:

"Of course, sir, I made a fool of myself the other evening. I lost my head and kissed Mervee——"

"Hot-headed youth," Sir Islwyn sighed. "I envy you, my boy. Ethically it is all wrong, and no doubt Mervee would hate you for it at first, but, believe me, in the end it is the strong man who wins a woman's love and admiration."

Mervee found it difficult to get away that night. Dilys played the harp oblivious as to whether she interested her audience or not. Mervee could stand it no longer. She whispered to her father that she was tired—ill—would be all right in the morning. She slipped away.

He excused her behaviour to his guests:

"She has been overdoing it lately, eh, Howel? The last show was a bit of a strain for her. But we are trying to persuade her to go up to London to stay with Lady Mari Wynne."

"Do her heaps of good," said Dilys. "Wish I had the chance. I want to hear Corris, the singer from America. She is Welsh, you know. They say she is forty-five if she is a minute; and she looks twenty! She's been to Vienna and had monkey glands. She has light baths and massage, and lives on lamb cutlets and pineapple."

"Do you believe everything you hear?" chuckled Sir Islwyn.

"Everything I want to believe," Dilys retorted sweetly.

Once away from the social circle in the state drawing-room at the Priory, Mervee made her way across the park, across the moor, until she reached the octagon tower. She could not go on with this hectic state of tortured agony. If she had hurt Gareth she must know

what she had done. Was she not willing to abandon everything for him—father, home, possessions? How often had Sir Islwyn said: "If you marry that fellow, if it is in my power, I will leave you as poor as a rat. I will marry Dilys Pennant. I will have an heir. . . ." His threats had left her unruffled.

She sat down on a great stone within the tower and waited, just as on a night Gareth had waited for her, and just as on another night Morvydd had waited for her false love. . . .

Have you ever waited for a lover? Have you ever waited sick with fear that something—something, you knew not what—had parted you for ever? Have you gone up to the old trysting-place and studied the road that was once like the pathway to the Garden of Eden, inasmuch as it brought love to you? Have you waited until the moon grew pale and the stars dim and the warmth passed out of the air, and a chilliness cruel as death crept in your veins and froze the blood that had once leapt up as a joyous flame at the sound of his coming? And the road that had been the pathway of Eden became the roadway to Gethsemane?

Suddenly, forgetting the vivid glory of her scarlet gown, Mervee fell upon her knees. She was so afraid this lover of hers would not come that she could hardly bear the waiting; but at last the bushes were parted and Gareth came into the tower, and she sprang to her feet.

"You asked me to come. Here I am."

She studied him for a moment, feasting her eyes on his black hair, his pale, haggard features.

"Gareth!" She flung her arms around his neck and pillowed her head upon his coat.

He remained upright, unyielding.

"Gareth!"

"I am sick of my own name."

"But once," she went on tremulously, "you said my voice was sweet to you!"

"A man says many things to many women."

It was then that Mervee turned upon him passionately :

" Are you trying to say that when you told me of your love you were making a mock of me ? "

" No, I did not mock you. I did not know life, that is all."

" You changed in a moment."

" Do we not all change in a moment ? "

" Oh, my dear," cried Mervee, " you are shutting out love."

" Yes, I am shutting out love," Gareth agreed. " It is well that the mistake was discovered before it was too late."

" I was foolish to ask you to come to-night," said Mervee, after a tense pause ; " but all women are foolish when they love—that truth has been known to me for a long time. I always said : ' No man shall make me love him so much that one day I may not be able to live without him.' And you came—I gave you my heart."

Gareth's arms were folded ; his head was bent so low that Mervee could not see that his eyes were closed. He was thinking to himself : " This is how my mother pleaded with Sir Ivor Prichard. She gave him all her love, and he. . . . "

Oh, it was intolerable ! All the time Mervee was speaking the old temptation was upon him. To throw himself at her feet, as if she were one of the little saints set up in a niche which he had seen during his wandering abroad. He longed to enfold her in his arms and cry out : " Mervee, why are you a Prichard ? Why are you not a girl from the village, a simple country girl with whom I could settle down, with whom I could live in Llanina all the rest of my days ? Why has love become even as the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden between you and me ? " The more he thought of these things the greater became his distress. To-night he would send Mervee away from him, and his heart would be hungry. Sleep would become a stranger to him. He wanted her—

wanted her all the more because she wanted him. Desire is begotten of desire. When it is reciprocated familiarity does not destroy it ; it is quickened into greater and still greater bliss. . . . The amazing truth dazed him. To-night he could resist her, because he was armed by his misery and distress. But if he met her when he was unprepared, if he saw her day after day. . . . Oh, the fight would be too cruel ! " I must do something, get away. Give myself, the worst of me, to another girl—anybody, anybody," he thought wildly, " so that I can make it impossible even to look upon Mervee's face."

" I understand," said Mervee quietly. " I only wanted to say, much as I love you, I do not want you unless you want me. Many men offer something they call love, but it is only a mockery of the thing which I thought was shared by you and me."

He heard her little feet pass swiftly over the dry moss, the rustle of the bushes as she forced her way through them. He fought down his longing to rush after her and drag her back and to kiss the tears from her eyes, to woo the smile back to her enchanting lips with the old passion, and to say : " Mervee, why has God placed this curse upon me, the curse of a woman who was wronged ! "

To-morrow he would go to Happy Vale. The name caused his full lips to curve into an ironical grin. He would see the lawyer who controlled that vast estate ; he would get out of Llanina. . . .

It was late when Mervee reached the Priory, the guests had gone, and, to her dismay, her father was walking restlessly up and down the hall. When he saw her his face darkened.

" Ah, there you are ! " he cried. " When you left us to-night I knew that all your excuses were false. I guessed that you had gone off on your nightly chase of a man who thinks so little of you that he dare not come here to face me. It cannot go on. You told me yourself last night that he was tired of you, and yet you run him

to earth like this—a wretched, poverty-stricken cad. Don't you think that I have been patient with you?" he went on in a cool, hard voice.

"You will have no further trouble with me. I only saw him to-night to tell him it was the end."

"Glad to hear it," snapped Sir Islwyn. "But I want to make things quite clear to you. I will give you six months to decide. At the end of that period you must marry a man of your own rank and station in life. If you don't agree, I shall marry a young wife."

"Oh, why threaten me?" cried Mervee. "Carry out your desires, and leave me in peace."

"You have no mercy on an old man and an old name. I will not have it disgraced by your man-hunting habits. But I am going to do all in my power to prevent further trouble. Now I think you had better go to bed."

For a long time after Mervee had left for her room Sir Islwyn paced the hall. He knew a great deal about the obstinate nature of women; but he did not understand the independent spirit of nineteen twenty-six. It would not be curbed or chained. It was essentially progressive. Again the old bitter cry came to his lips: "If only she had been a boy!"

When Sir Islwyn came down to breakfast the following morning the butler informed him that Miss Mervee had gone out riding.

Sir Islwyn frowned. He had intended to be a little more conciliatory in his manner to her. With morning sunshine came discretion. He was sorry he had mentioned his intention of marrying if she thwarted his plans. It was the second time he had done so. The first time she had turned white and defiant, the second time . . . there was a look in her eyes that haunted him. He did not wait to read his morning paper when he strode out of the house; he went straight off to Carreg Ina.

Lisi opened the door. Her face was wreathed in smiles.

"Yes, yes, the preacher is in his study," she told him.

" All Wales is coming to see him. The telegrams are pouring in. . . . He is to be the Archdruid of Wales. Oh, Sir Islwyn bach, it is fine."

Sir Islwyn hesitated.

" Is it true, then, about his sight ? "

" He is now at his desk ; but he will not write. He just looks out across the sea, and prays——"

" Then I will not intrude upon him."

" But he said no one was to be turned away for sure ! "

Sir Islwyn fidgeted with his stick. In his present state of mind he felt he could not look upon this man, and he said : " It is not Mister Elys I wish to see, but his nephew."

" Then you have come just in time. He is going off to Maes y Groes."

Lisi led the way into the small dining-room, and Sir Islwyn looked around the plainly furnished room, with its odd pieces of Chippendale and its quaint dresser from which rows of old-fashioned jugs were suspended. He stood before the open window, a frown was upon his face. . . . At the sound of a step he turned, and for the first time he came face to face with Gareth, and his angry expression gave place to one of absolute amazement.

" You—are Gareth Elys ? "

" That is my name, Sir Islwyn."

Sir Islwyn did not expect to see a man of Gareth's build and carriage. Even his countrified clothes could not rob him of that air of breeding which hitherto Sir Islwyn had not met in a man who came from what the squire called " the people."

" I want to have a little friendly talk with you about my daughter. You will respect my wishes when I say that I do not wish her to know that I have seen you. I expected you to come to the Priory. As a matter of fact, Mister Elys gave me to understand that you intended to do so. I feel angry at your behaviour, but of course it is possible that you have come to your senses. You no doubt realise for yourself that it would be utterly impossible for my daughter to marry a poor man. I

came to thank you for the attitude you have taken. I came to ask you to stick to that attitude."

"I promise."

Sir Islwyn was a little surprised at the quick way in which Gareth replied.

"Llanina is a small place. You may meet."

"I am going away. Not far away, I admit; but I must work with my hands. I have had a letter from a lawyer at Maes y Groes. He says that he has something of importance to tell me. I am glad. I met a man who was working on the Maes y Groes estate the other day; he promised to tell him about me. I want work."

"That's all right then; you are leaving here. Mervee will get over her infatuation all right. Good-bye." He held out his hand. Gareth ignored it, and opened the door.

"I think you had better go, Sir Islwyn," he said quietly. "This is no place for a Prichard. We are humble people."

The half-cynical smile on Gareth's lips brought a flush of anger to Sir Islwyn's face.

"Impudent, most impudent," he thought. But, struggling to retain his suave manner, he said: "I shall most certainly call and see Mister Elys when I am passing this way. I am sure that he will quite appreciate my position. I did not hide my views from him on the first day we met; I explained them to him."

"I am sure he will understand."

Sir Islwyn walked slowly up the street, and Gareth went up to the study, and he said:

"I shall never marry Mervee. It is all over. I have agreed with her father in all that he has said."

An hour later found him in a motor-bus on his way to Maes y Groes. By the main road it was a two hours' run. Maes y Groes was a village of grey stone houses set at the foot of the mountains. It was market day, and a gay country crowd thronged the streets. Gareth

found the office he sought. The solicitor's name was engraved upon a brass plate on the right-hand side of a green door.

Gareth gave his name to a clerk. Two minutes later he was ushered into the inner office where clients were interviewed. A tall man arose out of a chair and obsequiously held out his hand.

" I came in answer to your letter. I want work badly ; anything——"

The lawyer smiled, wiped his glasses with a silk handkerchief and fixed them carefully on his nose.

" My dear sir," said he, " for over twenty years I have waited for this day. Let me congratulate you. Look out north, south, east, and west upon the vast estates of Maes y Groes. You are the heir."

CHAPTER XXI

THE WORLD AT HIS FEET

HAVE you ever felt that the world is a tumultuous hub whirling you round and round like a leaf blown from a tree, leaving you, a helpless human atom, cast upon the beach of despair ? For a moment Gareth was unable to answer the man who addressed him so obsequiously. There was deference and relief in the lawyer's tones. His mood suggested a desire to convey the impression :

" I am glad you have come, glad that my responsibilities are at an end, and, yet because I have been a good steward, I trust that I shall not be deprived of representing your interests in the future.

Gwyn Vaughan was tall and thin, well-dressed in a navy blue suit. He wore a stiff collar, a neat black tie, and over his well-polished black boots there were tan spats. His hair was grey ; he was clean-shaven ; a pair

of tortoiseshell glasses dangled from a watered-silk ribbon. The office looked as prosperous as its owner. The walls, distempered a greenish-blue shade, were adorned with prints of famous judges, bewigged and robed. The County Court Judge of the district, His Honour Judge Hughes, occupied the place of distinction over the fireplace. Massive oak bookcases were arranged beneath the pictures, and volumes of well-bound law books showed through the glass doors. The oak writing-table was furnished with a blotting pad, ink, paper, and several handbooks on law. A current issue of *Who's Who* and a volume of Debrett hinted at the fact that Vaughan numbered members of what is known as the nobility and gentry amongst his clients. On the far end wall beneath the Lord Chief Justice of England hung a large plan of the Maes y Groes Estate, drawn to scale. Hanging on either side of the plan were elaborate composite photographs of the district. Certain spaces were coloured blue, green, and orange. . . .

At last Gareth found his tongue; and he said helplessly as he twirled his felt hat between his fingers:

"There is some mistake, sir. I am certainly not the heir to any property." A faint smile showed upon his haggard features. "I am the nephew of the Llio Elys of Llanina. One day I met an old man on Plas Twm, a shepherd who has worked on this estate all his life. I told him I wanted a job, on the land, anything . . . and he promised to speak to you about me. . . . I'm the man who came in answer to a letter stating that you had something of importance to tell me. . . . I'm not afraid of work. I have roughed it in Australian gold-fields and on Australian farms."

"It is quite true what you read in my letter," Vaughan interrupted. "I have matters of the greatest importance to discuss with you. Very confidential things, Mr. Elys Won't you sit down?"

With a short laugh, Gareth took the proffered chair.

" A man is not often treated in this fashion when he comes after a job ! "

" I spoke the truth when I told you that you were heir to the estate of Maes y Groes," Vaughan answered gravely. " The day you attained your majority you became the owner. I was not in the position to disclose these facts to you until you came of age."

There was a tense silence, broken at last by Gareth's agitated voice.

" There is no reason on earth why you should mock me. . . . Have I not suffered enough since my birthday ? It seems a lifetime——"

" I do not mock you," Gwyn Vaughan answered earnestly. " If you will permit me, Mr. Elys, my one desire is to serve you. I am going to ask you a straight question. Do you know your father's name ? "

Gareth flushed ; and he replied impetuously, " I wish to God that I'd never come near you ! "

" Then, under the terms of the trust placed upon me, I should have had to come to you," Vaughan at once replied. " It was left entirely to my discretion whether I showed you a certain letter or not. At one time it was suggested by our late client that the source from whence this estate came should not be made known to you. Our client said : ' Let it be understood that it was inherited from a distant relation abroad. You know, the sort of stunt that one sometimes reads about in newspapers.' Our client," the lawyer went on, trying to ease matters a little, " possessed a sense of humour. But before his death he changed his mind. . . . Now," said Vaughan thoughtfully, " you look a strong, healthy fellow ; which would you prefer, a sweet pill or a bitter one ? "

" The truth," Gareth answered.

Vaughan touched an electric bell on his desk and a solicitor's clerk came in.

" Bring the Maes y Groes deed-box," said Vaughan. And again trying to ease a difficult situation, he drew a

silver case out of his pocket and held it out to his visitor. Gareth chose a cigarette, lit it, and glanced mechanically at the crowds in the streets through the wire blind that covered the lower part of the window.

The deed-box was placed on the table, and when the clerk withdrew Vaughan unlocked it. He took out a bundle of papers, and he found an envelope. "Read this," said he to Gareth, "I think that is the easiest way of explaining the situation to you."

"I have done nothing else but read messages from the dead for ages," Gareth muttered miserably.

"We lawyers, even in country districts such as these," Vaughan confided, "are often more like father confessors than the dried-up inhumans that some people imagine us to be. Romance sometimes embroiders red tape. It is no good taking the world too seriously. We fret, moan, and kick against the pricks—and yet how foolish it is! In less than a hundred years, it's all the same, we are ashes——"

Gareth forced himself to unfold the letter. It commenced abruptly:

"DEAR VAUGHAN,—As you know, some time ago I bought up the Maes y Groes lands. I received reliable information that not only does the estate possess fine pastoral land, but also minerals. The whole of this rugged region is one immense reservoir of metallic treasure—silver ore, lead ore, and quartz—so it will prove a profitable property. The various mines are already in a state of development. In twenty-one years Maes y Groes will have become one of the richest heritages in Wales. All the profits from Maes y Groes, and Maes y Groes itself, is to be held in trust by you for Gareth, the son of Morvydd Elys, Carreg Ina, Llanina, as willed by me to my son—the son of the said Morvydd Elys. In my will it was my intention that for his own sake the boy should not know my name—but, understanding Morvydd better

now than I did at the period when I made the will, I am going to leave it to your discretion whether you disclose the truth to the boy or not. It seems damned unfair to me that the sins of the parents are frequently visited upon their luckless offspring. I believed myself to be a free man when I married Morvydd Elys ; but, when I discovered that this was not the case, I offered to make a large settlement upon her, but she refused it. I could do no more. I have invested every penny I possess in the interests of my son, Gareth. Had Morvydd chosen to be more reasonable, her own life and mine might have been happier. However, do the best for the boy—my son ! "

The letter was signed " Ivor Prichard."

" I won't touch a penny of his damned money. He killed my mother. His brutality drove her to her death." Gareth raised an angry, tortured face to the lawyer.

" Have you ever realised that it was a strange coincidence that Sir Ivor Prichard and your mother lost their lives on the same night ? " Vaughan asked quietly.

" Never thought about it."

" But there was a significance about it all the same," Vaughan persisted. Sitting down, he pushed the blue paper across the table to Gareth. " I have definite proof," said he, " Sir Ivor died nobly. . . . He died in trying to save your mother's life."

" Go on."

" A fugitive gipsy, suspected of poaching, saw what happened—a weird, clever fellow. His caravan was hidden away somewhere on the moors near Llanina. On the night that your mother lost her life the gipsy's wife was about to give birth to a child. Her husband cleared out to make more room. He took shelter in the ruins of an unused tower. Months afterwards he came to my office. He had seen the reward we offered for any information that could be given to us concerning Sir Ivor's death. The gipsy did not come to us straight

away, for fear the caravan would be turned on to the tramping road before his wife was well. . . . We took his story down in the presence of a witness. The gipsy signed it on oath. . . . I thought : ' Maybe one day Sir Ivor's son will like to know how his father died.' "

Gareth glanced at the document, and he read :

" I fell asleep, but I was awakened by the sound of a horse galloping across the moor, and I peeped from behind a big stone and I saw a man whom I knew to be Sir Ivor Prichard get off the horse. He tethered the animal and I heard him say :

" ' Hello, hello ! Are you there, Morvydd ? '

" I wondered what was going to happen, so I climbed up on a stone where I could see right into the tower. I was surprised to see Sir Ivor there at that hour. Inside the tower I saw a girl. She was on her knees ; she looked as if she was saying her prayers. She sprang up and rushed to Sir Ivor, and he said :

" ' I came to-night because you threatened me. I told you before that when you threaten you harden me. A woman's threats leave me like winter ice on Snowdon.' And then she told him that he was breaking her heart.

" Sir Ivor took his pipe out of his pocket, filled it and lit it. She seemed to go mad when she saw him do this. She dragged the pipe from his mouth and threw it on the ground. He said something about breaking one of his teeth, and that she was not in a mood to discuss things, and he said good-bye. She ran after him.

" ' Cariad, I am sorry I made you angry,' she cried. ' Be good to me.' She tried to kiss him, but he turned his face aside. The girl seemed to fall upon a stone. She did not know what she was doing. ' It's about our marriage,' she said, ' and Gareth. Do you never want to see your son ? '

" ' The whole thing is intolerable,' Sir Ivor answered. ' I offered to provide for you. You refused——' She

would not listen to him, but went on arguing and crying. . . . He left her.

" ' Of course she won't do it,' I heard him mutter as he mounted the horse. ' It's her way to threaten.' Then the girl came out of the tower. For a moment she looked at Sir Ivor—he was riding away. She called ' Cariad ! ' But he did not hear it. . . . The next moment the girl was running rapidly away from the ruin. She disappeared over the edge of the cliff. . . . She tore madly along the sands. I stood up and shouted—shouted—but no one heard me. I saw Sir Ivor turn his horse's head ; he did not see me. He came back to the tower, and went down the cliff. He galloped across the sands, but he could not reach the girl—for suddenly his horse could not move. The animal was afraid ; it neighed and shook its head. I saw the girl in the water, and heard her cry when the waves went over her. . . . Sir Ivor tried to dismount. He stumbled . . . and it seemed as if the earth opened. He could not reach the girl . . . and he was buried in the quicksands."

Gareth had finished reading. The paper lay before him. His elbows were on the table, his head was bent low upon his breast. Vaughan did not break in upon his reverie. He saw that Gareth was having a struggle with himself—a sharp battle with a turbulent will which might so easily wreck him. Had his mother not been a warm-hearted emotional Celt—and his father—were not the Prichards of Llanina one of the oldest families in Wales ? Welsh blood—when is Welsh blood a peaceful heritage ?

" My dear fellow, what can I do for you ? "

" Water—if I could have some water ! "

Vaughan disappeared into the next room, and a minute or two later he was back with a glass.

" Stupid of me," Gareth said faintly, " stupid of me—like a woman. It was awful—awful," he muttered, " to read of my mother's pitiless end."

"But your father——"

"Selfish devil," Gareth replied. "The Prichards are a detestable race. I hate every one of them. I'll starve rather than touch a penny of this money. Nothing more or less than blood money.

Vaughan stared at him in amazement. For a moment he felt that he could not trust the sound of his own ears.

"You are taking an unreasonable view of the situation," he protested helplessly. "You must not forget the words 'to err is human—to forgive divine.' You are very like your father. When you first came into the office the resemblance gave me a shock."

He pulled out a drawer, and produced a square leather case, and he touched a spring and revealed a photograph.

"There you are," cried Vaughan. "Look in the glass at your own features, and then at the photograph. Can you judge a man so harshly whose blood flows in your veins?"

With a gesture of despair, Gareth looked down upon the features of Sir Ivor Prichard. The dark, bold eyes looked searchingly into his. So this was his father. He tried to fight against the emotion of pride that passed over him. He tried to feed upon the lust of hate, so that all feelings of kindliness might be withered before its devastating fires. But there was one thing which Gareth had to admit, and that was the attractiveness of the man. His hair was black, just like his own. His lips too, were the same, and slightly provocative. His nose, finely chiselled, was the same. He looked what he was—an aristocrat. A bad example morally, perhaps, but physically no one could deny that indefinable air about him. The air that he had bequeathed to his son, of breeding and distinction.

"It's damnable," Gareth groaned.

"Fine fellow, is he not?" Vaughan remarked quietly. "A fine fellow and a fine son."

"Damnable!" Gareth retorted. "Look here, you'd

better know the truth. My mother hated him and so do I." Briefly he told Vaughan of the injunction which his mother had placed upon him.

The lawyer paced up and down the room.

"Yes," he muttered, "very awkward for you. But when you've had more experience of women, you will know that their anger against an erring lover soon cools——"

"That statement cannot apply to my mother."

"How do we know? Suppose if she could come to us here straight away from the Land of Shadows. What would she tell us? That possibly even before the waters of Llanina Bay had wooed her to sleep, her bitter resentment against your father had vanished. A woman says much in anger that she does not mean."

"Well, indeed, you seem to know a great deal about them," said Gareth impatiently.

"What lawyer doesn't?" Vaughan smiled. "Women's souls are bared before us every day. Frequently they are absolutely merciless with regard to the man who has betrayed them. The machinery of the law is set in motion to bring the wrongdoer to book, and, just as frequently, within twenty-four hours we have the same woman back again, pleading and making excuses for the black sheep. Women in love are utterly illogical. I am talking of real love romance—not a mercenary affair. The sort of romance which existed between your parents. How do we not know that from the hour that your father paid the price by his life, that——"

"It's an impossible position for me," Gareth interrupted. He stood up, worried and agitated. "I came here for a job, and God knows——"

"That your father has made you one of the largest landowners in Wales," said Vaughan tersely.

"If I could find a ship, I'd set out for Australia again, and never come back—except that my uncle——"

"I've been reading the story of his recovery of sight. No exaggeration about it?" Vaughan asked, seeking to

change the trend of his thoughts, and thus hoping to calm him.

"No exaggeration at all," Gareth replied shortly. "I told him I was coming to Maes y Groes to work. I have my reasons for steering clear of Carreg Ina."

"I'm an old bachelor. Come home with me," cried Vaughan, slipping his arm through Gareth's. He took him across to the window. Pointing to a white house in the woods, he said: "That is Hengwrt, my home. Ceinwyn, my niece, has just finished her studies at the Royal College of Music in London, and she is staying with me. It will take a fortnight to show you over Maes y Groes."

"But suppose if I stick to what I said?"

"Rubbish, man bach," Vaughan protested. "A pretty girl, a pretty wife, will cure you of that folly. Start a family of your own. Make the name of Elys a mighty one in Wales. Show the Prichards of Llanina that a Welsh boy can rise to any position. Our destiny is in our own hands."

Gareth accepted the invitation. Within half an hour he and Vaughan were walking through the narrow streets, jostling and pushing their way through a merry Welsh crowd—rosy-faced farmers, pretty country maids, pale-faced colliers. Fair day at Maes y Groes brought sweethearts, and cattle-dealers, county people and peasant people together. . . .

At the gates of Hengwrt a girl was standing. Her hair was like a mesh of gold, her eyes brown, and her skin pale as the lilies in the fields. Her dress was blue, fashionably made, hardly the correct idea for country use albeit it suited the wearer admirably.

"Uncle, I've been waiting for you. You are late for dinner," she smiled; and then her glance rested on Gareth.

"This is Mr. Gareth Elys," Vaughan explained, "the nephew of the preacher of Llanina."

"The papers are full of the great things that have

happened to your uncle," said Ceinwyn. "I'm pleased to meet you."

When they reached the house Vaughan showed Gareth into the drawing-room. "Excuse me one minute," said he. He hurried off after Ceinwyn, who was making her way up the narrow old-fashioned staircase to her room.

"Tell Marged to put another knife and fork on the table for Mr. Elys, and to make up the bed in the spare room. He is going to stay here. What do you think of him?"

"Wherever did you pick him up?" laughed Ceinwyn. "Who is his tailor?"

"Don't be a fool," Vaughan retorted sharply. "All the girls will be running him to earth when they know the truth. You have the first chance; make use of it. He is the Squire of Maes y Groes. The world is at his feet, and his gold——" Vaughan paused. In his youth he had been a prize-winner at the Royal National Eisteddfod. He believed that he had some chance of blossoming forth as a minor poet. "And his gold," he said impressively, "is as plentiful as the grains of sand on the seashore."

CHAPTER XXII

LOVE ABANDONED

From the night that Mervee had told her father that he would have no further trouble with her, Sir Islwyn flattered himself that she intended to keep her word. She made no attempt to go to Llio. Various eminent people visited Carreg Ina—scientists, specialists—but Llio kept to his old cry: "The Lord gave me my sight." He would not listen to any scientific or learned theories as to the reason why he could see. It was at this period that he

was formally made Archdruid of Wales. Lisi and Teivi were full of pride with regard to the great honour that had been done to their beloved master.

"Pity indeed now," Lisi grumbled, "that Gareth wanted to go off, just when everything is going champion here."

"I miss the boy greatly," the Archdruid admitted regretfully. "But idleness is man's greatest enemy." He sighed and straightened out the pages of a letter. "Gareth will not be happy," he reflected, "until he has driven his love for Mervee from his heart. Who indeed am I to reason with him and say: 'Abandon this thing that troubles you.' Life is barren indeed when the flower of passion withers."

Gareth had written a guarded letter.

"There is plenty of work here, so do not worry about me. I can make all the money I want. I was exceedingly proud when I saw your photograph in the newspapers. I shall make an effort to come to the first meeting of the Gorsedd, over which the new Archdruid presides. . . ."

On receiving this letter Llio took up his pen and wrote to Mervee.

"As Gareth is away from home, perhaps you will come to see your old friend. But, at the same time, I do not wish you to do anything, Mervee fach, that might cause annoyance to Sir Islwyn. Show this to him, and abide by his decision. . . ."

Howel arrived at the Priory at an early hour one morning. A new hunter had been purchased for the Llanina stables. Nerth was a fine thoroughbred, with possibilities for a great future. The mare was to be Mervee's mount at the forthcoming show at Maes y Groes; but Sir Islwyn was anxious that his daughter should become thoroughly acquainted with her before riding at a big public gathering.

"I heard from my aunt this morning, sir," said Howel

to Sir Islwyn. " She has been pressing me to come and stay with her if you can spare me. This might interest you."

Sir Islwyn glanced at Lady Mari's communication, and he read :

> " Corris is the great operatic star, she is the rage of London. I met her at Lord Gwynfyd's the other Sunday night. As you know, he is the great patron of all things artistic, and of Welsh music in particular. . . . I happened to mention that my nephew was living with Sir Islwyn Prichard at Llanina Priory. Corris became intensely interested, and declares she must meet you. . . . She is going to place a box at our disposal when you come up, and she wants you to be ' very informal ' and have supper with her at Delardges afterwards, where, by the way, she has a luxurious suite of rooms. Try and persuade Sir Islwyn to join the party. . . . I should be most happy to entertain him and any of his friends.",

" London has no attraction for me these days," Sir Islwyn declared. " Traffic too damn bad, too noisy and too crowded. However, perhaps Dilys Pennant might like to go. She said something about wishing to hear this woman Corris. If all this could be worked discreetly, you know," Sir Islwyn went on—" a little party, as it were—perhaps Mervee could be induced to join in for a few days. She is more tractable, Howel. Stick to it my boy. Faint heart ne'er won fair lady."

When father and daughter met at luncheon the squire was in the best of good humours, and they discussed Nerth. Mervee was obviously thrilled with the new acquisition to the stables.

" We shall have a wonderful season," Sir Islwyn declared complacently. " Wish you'd do something to please me, my dear. . . ." He studied his daughter closely. With an uneasy pang he noticed tell-tale lines

around her eyes, as if she was not sleeping well. . . . "Go up to London for a few days and buy a new riding-outfit."

"Mine is all right," said Mervee; but she coloured faintly. Only the previous day the idea had occurred to her that her coat looked as if it had seen better days. "All right for everyday wear," she thought, "but for shows——"

She took great pride in looking her best on these occasions; besides, one never knew—— Even if she never heard the sound of Gareth's voice again, there was always the possibility that he might be one of the crowd who looked on. . . .

"Lady Mari Wynne wants Howel to meet Corris, the singing woman who is causing such a flutter in musical circles. Dilys Pennant——"

Sir Islwyn's remarks were interrupted by Mervee's impatient cry.

"Oh, why don't you take her yourself?"

The squire was not ill-pleased at the hasty jealous outbreak.

"On this occasion," he answered quietly, "I am not suggesting a prospective step-mother, but a friend who will shield you from Howel's too amorous attentions. He is more sensible now. However, be jolly. I will get at Dilys and ask her to make one of the party. You need change of scene——"

"Gareth has gone away," Mervee said abruptly. "If I agree to this London visit, may I go down to Carreg Ina as I used to do?"

Sir Islwyn was charmed with the compromise.

"Certainly, my pet. Let us bury our differences. Personally, I like the old man, and, now that the nephew is no longer giving trouble, I whole-heartedly withdraw my restrictions."

"Thank you." Mervee astonished her father by kissing him swiftly upon the cheek.

"And Lady Mari——"

"Fix it up just as you like," Mervee told him. "I will do what you wish."

When Lisi opened the door to Mervee that afternoon she gasped with astonishment.

"Oh, my dear, how we miss you!" she cried, with some emotion. "'Indeed to goodness,' said Teivi this morning when he was shaving in the scullery, 'the house is like a tomb, when Mervee fach is not in and out of the place.'"

Mervee found Llio in his favourite chair facing the window. She crept on tip-toe behind him and covered his eyes with her little brown hands.

"Mervee!"

"Yes. I've come. I told my father. It's all right."

She knelt at the Archdruid's side, and he placed his hand upon her head and looked earnestly at her quivering features.

"That is well. The place is lonely without you or Gareth."

She told him of her prospective visit to Lady Mari, and he listened earnestly, albeit his features were grave.

"You are pleased to go?" he asked.

Mervee turned to him wildly.

"Of course I am pleased," she cried; "for now I know that love is a sham!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LINK THAT BINDS

WHEN Llio gazed upon Mervee's agitated face he searched his heart for words of comfort, but no inspiration came to him. With the gift of his sight came new ideas, new thoughts. Much of his self-confidence had deserted him,

and he no longer believed that the hands of God were placed beneath his feet to guide him along perilous byways and precipitous heights, but there were other compensations. Now that he could see Mervee's glowing vitality he realised the fierceness of the tormenting fires through which Gareth had passed. Mervee saw the shadow that had fallen upon Llio. She thought it was because she had told him of her visit to London, that he regarded her with regret.

"I am going away for a short time," she explained, seeking to cast aside the depression that was upon them. "I must have a few new clothes."

Llio shook his head.

"Whatever new experiences lie in store for you," said he quietly, "do not thrust love out of your heart! It is the only human emotion that keeps one on the fringe of heaven. Cast love aside and the soul becomes as gloomy as an old cavern on a winter's night. Even if it is all over between Gareth and yourself, surely such memories cannot be entirely forgotten. There was a time when I felt that there could be no ultimate happiness for you two, because your father had decided that his son-in-law must be selected for his wealth, and not for his character. I do not blame Sir Islwyn for his standard of values. It is his misfortune that he should not know that the only gamble worth a desperate risk is the human gamble to seek happiness through the gateway of love. Keep to your ideals, Mervee fach. Hap you have seen in the springtime rain and sleet driving across Llanina Bay, or you have watched great hailstorms forming a glittering veil across the face of the mountains. It is dark, the skies frown above us, and lo! even when we say: 'This is terrible, an awful storm, as if a magic wand has put a spell upon the elements,' the sun breaks forth from the clouds like a golden king in his power and majesty. And if you search the brown earth you will find a deep yellow blossom in the garden of Carreg Ina—a yellow crocus has pushed his golden head through

the soil. No storm could stem the eternal creative force. A flower was struggling into being albeit the tempest was upon the land. Thus it is with love. The human storm of life may toss us hither and thither, but deep in the heart the flower still blossoms. You cannot destroy it—you cannot kill it, although the veil of despair and disappointment may hide it from us. We cannot cheat our inner consciousness."

Mervee turned away from Llio. Her face was pale. She knew that every word he uttered was the truth.

"Am I not right, Mervee?"

"Well, yes, of course; but I do not understand why Gareth has treated me as if I am a complete stranger. I have seen him, and humbled myself," she went on, with a tell-tale flush upon her face, "but he is cold and unresponsive. If there was another girl, I could understand him better. Perhaps pride would help me to bear it. I might listen to my father and marry Howel."

"You would not give yourself to a man for whom you had no love!" Llio protested. "Promise me that you will not throw yourself away in that fashion."

"What is the use of my making promises? I do not know what to do," Mervee answered helplessly. "Anyway, I am pleasing my father now."

"Follow the dictates of your heart, but do not stay away too long from Llanina," Llio sighed.

Mervee left Carreg Ina shortly afterwards. She said good-bye to Teivi and to Lisi, and the latter called after her as she passed through the way of the gate:

"Miss Mervee fach, if you happen to be near Holborn now, buy me a nice red hat cheap. Teivi has been bothering me to buy a red hat. 'Fine it would look on your head,' said he. Men are foolish things, if they like you. Well, indeed, what does it matter if you are withered as a piece of dry seaweed, or as ugly as a rat, they will think you as sweet as a bunch of may blossom, especially if you keep their socks without holes, and your fingers out of their trouser pockets on pay day.

But don't forget to bring me a red hat from London, Miss Mervee fach. The new girl at the 'Bluebell' has a champion one—and Teivi has been home late on two nights."

Mervee framed her pallid lips into a smile.

"You shall have your red hat, Lisi dear, even if I search London for it."

For some time after Mervee had departed Llio was lost in deep reverie. He did not wish Mervee to trouble with his worries. But the unhappy thought came to him. "Not only has Gareth made a barrier between himself and me since his twenty-first birthday, but he has placed a barrier between himself and the girl of his heart." He penned a letter to his nephew that day:

"I am glad you have found work at Maes y Groes. Perhaps I was wrong to talk to you as I did about Mervee. She cares for you deeply. Once I said many things about duty, duty to those that are set in authority over us. But now I know that this great desire which once gripped you was the impulse of something far greater than we can fathom. It was the prompting of nature, seeking to mould fresh lives, from the union of two who temperamentally and physically meant so much to one another. If you are unhappy at Maes y Groes, forget all those things which caused me to fight the great forces that build up human life. You are hiding something about my Morvydd from me; but some day I pray that you and I may stand before one another without the shadow of secrecy between us, and that the bright light of trust and truth will again gild our saddened lives.

P.S.—Mervee is going to London to stay with Lady Mari Wynne. . . ."

Ceinwyn Rees was an ambitious girl. The daughter of the manager of some slate quarries in North Wales. Idris Rees had come to an untimely end, the result of

too many visits and too many hectic nights at the Royal Goat Inn. His wife, Mai, died shortly after her husband. Ceinwyn possessed that talent for music which is the inherent gift of most Welsh girls. She had just finished the teacher's course at the Royal College, that Mecca of so many ambitious daughters and sons of old Cambria, when her uncle suddenly offered her a home at Hengwrt, and she had wisely decided that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. After Gareth had gone to bed on the night of his arrival her uncle had confided his fears to his niece.

"This young fellow," Vaughan told her, "is not the ordinary type of man. He suffers from a great misfortune. To be quite candid, his father was not married to his mother, and yet one cannot quite regard it as the ordinary type of sordid story. There was a very strong element of romance in it, and, although without Mr. Elys's consent, I cannot give the name of his father, I may tell you, my girl, that the blood of the Welsh kings flows in his veins."

Ceinwyn's hard little face grew serious when she asked the question:

"Is it true what you said about his wealth?"

"It is impossible for us to estimate the vast mineral resources of Maes y Groes. And, would you believe it," Gwyn Vaughan confided to his niece, "Gareth Elys has the most absurd idea that, because he has some sort of feeling that his mother was betrayed by the man from whom he derives his fortune, he ought not to touch a penny of the money"

"If he did that," asked Ceinwyn quietly, "what would happen?"

"Every penny of it would go the University of Wales."

Ceinwyn laughed and showed her little white teeth.

"Well, indeed," said she, "don't you think I am a more worthy object than the University of Wales?"

"See to it for my sake that it does not go there,"

Vaughan urged her. "If it went out of my hands I should be a poor man. I have done the right thing by my late client. Everything is in perfect order. But if the present owner refused to accept the estate, its control would pass from me quick enough. Now you will understand the reason why I sent you fifty pounds for new clothes, with instructions to come to Hengwrt. I know more about the life of Gareth Elys than he knows himself. He is a fine fellow."

Ceinwyn, in a white dress, fair as a flower and sweet as honey, found Gareth by the trout stream in the pleasant grounds of Hengwrt one morning. He was lying full length upon the grass, gazing moodily into the rushing water, and when she said: "See, here is a love letter for you," she wondered at the sudden flash of interest in his eyes.

Hardly conscious of her presence, he tore the envelope open. "Perhaps I shall hear something about Mervee," thought he; for, although he could never marry her, he knew that no one in the wide world could take her place. He read to the end of the letter, and then he came to the postcript: "Mervee is going to London to stay with Lady Mari Wynne." Howel's wealthy relation! A great fear fell upon him, and he turned impulsively to Ceinwyn and said:

"What is your opinion of life? Your uncle tells me that you know London well. That in the Royal College you met many girls, many boys. All sorts and conditions of life, assembled together. Within those four walls all the emotions of life run riot. Do you believe that wealth can buy love?"

Ceinwyn studied the speaker earnestly; she had never seen anyone quite like Gareth before; when he spoke she was momentarily mesmerised by his personality. From that moment she regarded him as something more than a man "whose gold was as plentiful as the grains of sand on the seashore." Here was a man worth more than a passing interest. Every day Gareth's magnetism became

more compelling, and his power of fascination was inherited from his father. On Gareth's part it was unconscious, but not less dominating. For a woman to know him was to create within her a desire to be held in his arms, so that he might whisper strange things into her ears; so that she might give herself up in rapturous abandonment to his caresses. . . . This emotion was experienced by Ceinwyn when he lay before her on the grass. She slipped down by his side. . . . She had gone to the Royal College bubbling over with hope to embark upon a musical career, and she had found herself one of a herd. There were many girls more brilliant than she. A vague sense of disappointment had passed over her. Everybody told her the same thing: "If you want to get on, you must have influence—a sponsor, to push you along, to put cash down." Old ambitions gripped her when she heard Gareth's question. Was there anything she would not do to gratify her ambitions? She gave a tremulous sigh.

"Oh, wealth is a wonderful thing," she answered softly. "If it could not buy love, it could buy something very near to it."

"What is that?" asked Gareth, with renewed interest.

"Well, gratitude, of course," Ceinwyn answered. "I went to London with all sorts of ideas. But, when I reached there, they were soon abandoned. I went to various musical shows with students. For instance, I heard Corris. She was starred in enormous letters. She was beautiful. But I have heard that she would never have been so successful in her youth had she not possessed a wealthy lover. Do you blame her because she sold her love?"

"Love cannot be bought," Gareth answered quietly. "A man might possess a body, but not the vital, pulsating spirit force that is flesh and blood, the soul of the woman he wants."

Ceinwyn laughed softly; she was amused that this

great, strong fellow could so easily betray his romantic vein.

"Love cannot be bought." Her whole face softened when she said these words. Gareth gave a sigh of relief. Here at least was a sympathetic nature, and his heart was hungry for sympathy and understanding. Only a woman could impart this comfort to a man.

"Stay with me and talk. I like you. I like you enormously."

"I believe you've had a secret love-affair," Ceinwyn retorted. Her tone was a challenge. Gareth lit his pipe, and drew at it silently some moments before replying.

"I've been in love right enough."

A slight frown showed itself on Ceinwyn's pretty face. She was hoping that he was unspoilt, untouched by throes of passion for a woman. If she was to follow the scheme so subtly laid down by her uncle, she wanted to be the first to teach him the most alluring emotion in the wide world; but apparently . . .

"That is why I asked you the question about buying love," said Gareth, breaking in upon her reverie. "When I was poor nobody wanted me. I wondered, if I fell in with Mr. Vaughan's wishes and took this over"—and he pointed to the valley—"if I could have gone to a certain place to bargain and barter for the one woman I wanted. But I am talking nonsense, for the one woman I wanted is forbidden fruit. She can never be mine. And yet I wonder what her father would have done if I had said: 'I am Gareth Elys of Llanina, owner of Maes y Groes.'"

"If you have to bargain for a girl like that, she is not worth thinking about," said Ceinwyn.

"Ah, you have misunderstood me," Gareth interrupted. "She would have married me just as I was, without a bean, but her father——"

"Do you think, if I loved a man, I would care what anyone said?" she asked passionately.

"The accident of birth separated us in the first instance,"

Gareth explained. "She was not of humble origin like myself. She was an aristocrat. That was one objection; and then an obstacle arose from my people; so fate parted us. Oh," he added desperately, "if only I could forget her, I should be a happy man!"

"Well, everything has its compensation," sighed Ceinwyn, edging a little closer to him. She had been considered irresistible amongst her student friends. If Gareth had been taken with one girl, why should he not be taken by another? "I'm glad you've told me all about this yourself," she went on in a low voice. "Uncle said last night that he wanted us to be great friends. Will you regard me as such?"

Gareth glanced sharply towards her, but her expression was gentle. In her eyes he saw the kind light which he had welcomed. Did it not betray the sympathy for which his soul yearned?

"Uncle says," Ceinwyn added, "that he hopes you will stay with us for a long time, until all your plans are settled. And there is an old mansion in the mountains, Pant y Cariad, my uncle wants to show it to you. Strange, is it not, but he told me it was the place where you were born. 'A certain amount of money spent on it,' said my uncle, after you had gone to bed last night, 'and it would make a splendid country place for Mr. Elys.'"

"The place where I was born?" Gareth flushed. "Do you mean to say that it is on the Maes y Groes estate?"

"Well, yes, indeed."

"I wonder if Mr. Vaughan told you that I had not decided yet whether I would take this property or not?"

"Of course you will take it," Ceinwyn answered sharply. "Will you not let me help you? Am I not lonely also? Have I not lost everything too, father and mother?"

Gareth brushed his hand across his forehead.

"Yes, yes," he said wearily. "I'll be glad if you will help me to forget, my dear." And then the tempting voice of Gwyn Vaughan came to his memory, when Gareth had first suggested that he might refuse to take over Maes y Groes.

"Rubbish, man bach, a pretty girl, a pretty wife, will cure that folly. Start a family of your own. Make the name of Elys a mighty one in Wales. Show the Prichards of Llanina that a Welsh boy can rise to any position."

"Do you feel ill, boy bach?" Ceinwyn asked anxiously, for she noted that the warm colour had faded away from Gareth's features.

"I'm all right." He stood up; and Ceinwyn smilingly held out her hand.

"Help me up, there's a good boy."

He caught her hand, and the next moment she was standing by his side.

"About my home—the place where I was born," Gareth asked, "could you take me to it?"

"Yes, of course I will; but it is far from here."

"If we had horses," Gareth suggested, "we could ride. I did a lot in Australia. I should like to ride, but, of course, when one has no money——"

"You have lots. But I've never ridden in my life."

"I would soon teach you," Gareth cried. "You'd look fine on a horse." His face hardened. Mervee rode; why not this girl—this girl who looked up at him with her bewitching, smiling eyes, promising to help him to forget? . . .

When Vaughan came home to luncheon Gareth and Ceinwyn were still in the garden; restraint had fallen away from them. They were talking like a couple of old friends. A smile of satisfaction showed itself upon Vaughan's suave countenance.

"I see you two are getting on famously."

"Yes," said Ceinwyn, "do you know where we could

hire a pair of horses? Gareth is going to teach me to ride. Oh, uncle, if only I had a habit!"

"Not a habit," Gareth interposed, and the new frown that appeared to have developed the last twenty-four hours showed itself between his eyes. "A coat to the knees, and riding-breeches."

"And you in nice corded breeches," laughed Ceinwyn.

"You two are going ahead, choosing one another's clothes," cried Gwyn Vaughan, laughing. "Morris, the tailor, had better come and live at Hengwrt until he has fitted you out."

"It's the only way to see the county," said Gareth—"the only way."

"For the Squire of Maes y Groes to visit his estate," Vaughan jocularly agreed. Life was stretching forward before him like an Eastern paradise; the scent of pleasant fruits was in his nostrils. All the morning he had been harassed by the deadly fear that this hot-blooded son of Wales might throw his heritage away, that his idealistic temperament might ruin him, and ruin those who had served him faithfully. Vaughan took the red and blue silk handkerchief out of his pocket and blew his nose, and offered up a silent prayer of thanksgiving that he had been rewarded for his charitable deed when he had brought Ceinwyn to his home. "The ways of man are strange," thought he "Happy is the man whose instincts, guide him aright to succour the fatherless." Ceinwyn had suddenly blossomed into a Rose of Sharon; she was worth her weight in gold. When Morris had taken her measurements, the best riding-kit in London should be sent down to her. . . .

Ceinwyn slipped away from the two men.

"You will take over Maes y Groes straight away?" Vaughan asked Gareth. "I've got all the papers ready for you to sign in the office."

"She told me a wonderful thing, your niece Ceinwyn," said Gareth absent-mindedly. "She told

me that the place where I was born is on this estate."

"Yes, it is quite true," Vaughan answered.

"It is the link that binds me to Maes y Groes," said Gareth.

CHAPTER XXIV

CORRIS

LADY MARI WYNNE'S snug little town house faced the Park on one side and Knightsbridge on the other, at a point where Sloane Street joins on to the great throbbing thoroughfare which leads into Piccadilly. She was a pretty woman with a complexion as delicate as a piece of Dresden china. Her clothes were well chosen and frequently fashioned in soft shades of blue, the latter being her favourite colour. Her luxuriant hair was silvery, giving the impression, by its silky texture, that it had been powdered. Her blue eyes were bright and sparkling, but possibly it was her happy smile that was one of her greatest attractions. Her personality made her a general favourite in that bewildering patchwork of human nature—the smart world. She knew exactly what she was doing, when she scribbled off an apparently careless letter to Howel. In spite of her gentleness and charm, there was a streak in her nature which demanded some sort of allegiance from the younger members of the great family to which she belonged. Being a childless woman, she had regarded Howel as a man whom she could claim to fill this void. Before he was twenty she had discovered that he was purely selfish, living for himself, and yet there was nobody else of her kin to take his place in her scheme. Lord Wynne had lost his life in the Great War, also his heir, and now there was no male to perpetuate the illustrious line.

"Howel"—she pursed her lips when her maid was

brushing her hair one evening—" Howel must marry. He must have a son." Thus she planned and plotted. Where her nephew failed, his son, under her tuition, might succeed. If only Sir Islwyn Prichard's daughter could be persuaded to see eye to eye with her, what an excellent thing it would be, from every point of view. From the moment that Lady Mari knew that Dilys Pennant, Howel, and last but not least, Sir Islwyn's daughter, were coming up to London to take advantage of her invitation, she began to make fresh plans. Of course, Howel and Mervee Prichard must be thrown together, left alone with one another as much as possible. She smiled contentedly. It was a good idea for another girl to come along, provided that the other girl was not the type to throw herself at Howel's head. . . . And even if she did so, perhaps it would help things with Mervee. . . .

During that long run up to Euston, Mervee had been strangely silent. Howel did most of the talking, and Dilys, smoking cigarette after cigarette, was willing enough to play the rôle of interested listener. They reached Lady Mari's house in time to dress for dinner. The two girls had been given adjoining rooms. They did not see their hostess immediately on arrival. The butler informed them that dinner was at eight o'clock, and he told Howel that : " Her ladyship wished to see him at once in her room."

Howel glanced into a gilt-framed mirror which hung on the rose-silk panelled walls of the hall, and he straightened his tie. It was an involuntary movement of his when he was going to see a woman, no matter what her age might be. He found his aunt already dressed for dinner, seated before a fire in her elegantly appointed blue and silver bedroom which overlooked Hyde Park. At all seasons of the year, Lady Mari had a fire in her own room. If the weather was warm the windows were thrown wide open, and then the flowers in the window boxes, which were a notable adornment to her artistic

house, perfumed the room with their exotic fragrance. Her favourite chair, a big blue affair, covered in brocaded silk, was drawn near to the fire. The flames turned the silver tissue of her gown to gold, and played on her thoughtful, scheming features. She turned when the door opened, and her eyes lit up with a smile of critical welcome. Yes, she liked the cut of Howel's navy blue suit, it looked like Savile Row. Happily she did not know that pressing letters from his exclusive tailors were becoming a daily worry to him.

"Ah, my dear boy," she smiled, "so glad to see you. Draw a chair up to the fire, James will unpack for you. I gave orders before you arrived. You will find your togs waiting for you when you reach your room."

He bent over the chair and kissed his aunt lightly on the forehead.

"I failed in my first attempt to get Miss Prichard here," she smiled; "however, you know the old saying: 'If at first you don't succeed.'"

"Jolly decent of you to ask us."

"There is nothing I would not do to help my family along." Lady Mari smiled. "To me tradition and prestige mean everything. Even if I did not like a certain member of my family personally, it would not prevent my pushing him along if it lay in my power to do so."

"Hope that isn't a hint for me," Howel exclaimed unblushingly.

"You deserve the cap, if it fits," was Lady Mari's crisp reply. "The clan instinct is so deeply inbred in me that personal failings cease to annoy me. If one member drops out, my motto is, find another kinsman to stop up the gap. From what I have heard of Sir Islwyn Prichard, he has exactly the same ideas with regard to family traditions." She hesitated for a moment, and studied her silver brocaded shoes. "If this daughter of his made the wrong sort of match, I am quite sure that he is capable of marrying again to correct the *mésalliance*.

I intend to spare him the inconvenience by arranging a marriage between his daughter and my nephew."

"Yes, I want that too," Howel replied earnestly. "No doubt you read between the lines when Sir Islwyn wished Mervee to come to you. Some time back, she had an affair with a terrible outsider, nephew of a Methodist fanatic, but I believe the whole episode has blown over."

"Make the most of your chances now, anyway," Lady Mari urged him. "I know your poor father cannot afford to do much for you. Until you are suitably married to a girl who has my approval, I am afraid that I can do even less. During the short time you are here, I want you to do things well. Give the girl a good time, flowers and all that sort of thing. Fit yourself up with anything you may require."

Lady Mari got up and walked across to her writing table. She handed Howel a cheque for a hundred pounds.

"Take this little gift, with my earnest desire that it may help you to the happy life, which I trust may lie in store for you."

Howel could hardly believe his own eyes. A hundred pounds meant salvation. If only it had been two hundred pounds it would have left him a nice little surplus after keeping his most pressing creditors at bay. From another source also he was being mercilessly persecuted. Certain money had been given to him for that nefarious drug-carrying scheme which Gareth had discovered. The following month a further supply was due. It must reach its destination safely this time. Only one more throw of the dice, and he could clear himself of his difficulties. Then Mervee. Oh, if he could only rid himself of his old shackles, fair indeed would be this glorious life. But alas, he reflected bitterly: "'An old sin casts a long shadow.'"

Dilys Pennant, in daffodil yellow charmeuse, was a radiant figure that night. Yellow was perhaps not the

best of shades for her florid colouring, but Dilys was nothing if not a patriot where Welsh national life was concerned. She firmly believed in the theory that it was the daffodil, and not the leek, that the Welsh soldiers tore from the earth, as they rushed forward into battle centuries ago. Thus the gay daffodil colour was her first choice for an evening gown when she was out for conquest, just as the tall beaver hat, striped petticoat, and scarlet cloak was the costume that she donned for her annual visits to the Royal National Eisteddfodau of Wales.

Lady Mari thought her pleasant enough, but not quite the type for Howel. She was anxious to see if Mervee came up to the imaginary picture that she had conceived of her.

Howel, faultlessly turned out as usual, was leaning against the red brick mantelpiece, feeling in an extremely good humour with the world, and himself in particular.

Half shyly Mervee came into the room.

"Sorry, I'm afraid I'm late," she apologised, in her low, musical voice. The next minute she felt the friendly pressure of Lady Mari's hand that caused Mervee to experience that joyful thought: "Well, indeed, I feel that I have known her all my life."

Lady Mari gazed upon the girl's shining hair, the exquisite, vivacious face, and she noted the almost tragic wistfulness of her expression. For a moment this experienced woman of the world felt ashamed of her cold, calculating theories with regard to the sacrifice of the individual for the good of the race. "This child has suffered. She has loved," she thought. "If only she had had a mother to help her, to advise." And the bitter thought swept through her worldly mind, a thought which in past years had frequently tormented her: "Oh God, why did I not have a child of my own in my youth?"

From that hour Mervee fell easily into the ways of that charmingly ordered house at Knightsbridge. Although possessed of aristocratic ideas and habits with

regard to members of the theatrical or musical profession, Lady Mari was cosmopolitan and broadminded in her attitude towards them. She frankly disapproved of the decadent type that sprang from her own class and entered into competition with these people. At her artistic gatherings, one only met *bona fide* artists, never the ultra-modern type whose pedigree defamed or glorified the pages of Debrett. In this respect her friend the Most Noble Earl of Gwynfyd was at one with her, thus frequently his musical and artistic receptions were second to none in Europe.

If her soul had not been filled with longing for Gareth, Mervee might have been a happy girl, for Lady Mari did everything possible for the entertainment of her guests. Mervee rode in the park with Howel. Her photograph appeared in many of the leading picture papers as the "Beautiful Welsh heiress daughter of Sir Islwyn Prichard." Dilys took the triumphs of her friend good-naturedly. On the crest of success or failure, she hoped to reap some sort of reward for herself. As for Howel, he paid his tailor and ran into debt for more clothes. He regretted that he had not the nerve to alter the figure "one" to "two" before Lady Mari's cheque was cashed. He was forced to meet a Chinaman named Ling Chou, who dressed like an exotic European. He met him at a disreputable night club, when his aunt thought he was slumbering peacefully between lavender-scented sheets in his room at Knightsbridge. Oh, it was a dog's life, Howel thought wearily. Just now, when everything was going along so smoothly, everybody seemed to be pestering him for money, and he knew that Lady Mari, in spite of her remarkable kindliness, could become a hard taskmaster indeed if her little ships went sailing into strange seas. . . .

A week after Mervee's arrival in Town, she found herself at the opera. Corris had kept her word. Directly she heard from Lady Mari that the man she wished to meet was in London, a box was placed at her disposal.

Moreover, after the show her crowd was invited to a party at Lord Gwynfyd's mansion in Grosvenor Square. Howel, debonair and good-tempered, sat close to Mervee. She made a bewitching picture in one of her favourite scarlet evening gowns.

"A Welsh poppy, my dear," Lady Mari whispered in her ear. She, too, was looking singularly attractive with a Russian shaped diamond tiara on her white hair. It was what the newspapers declared to be "a pre-war night at the opera." Beautiful women, well-groomed men, flashing jewels, with which no other country in the world can compare.

Lady Mari had invited a young man to join their party whom she thought would interest Dilys. Nick-named "Taffy" by his brother officers and friends, Captain Jenkins held a commission in the Welsh Guards.

When the curtain went up there was a hush, a breathless silence, sobbing strains of music; the next moment Corris's passionate, alluring voice held the vast audience spellbound. She was petite, voluptuous.

"By jove, she's wonderful!"

It was Howel who spoke. Mervee was too much carried away by the music to offer an opinion. Her face was animated by excitement. Corris had conquered her emotions as she had conquered the emotions of every man and woman to whom she sang. She held them in the palm of her fascinating, jewelled hand. . . .

It was over at last. There were furtive dives into vanity bags for powder puffs, and handkerchiefs.

Lady Mari and her party bowled along in a luxurious Daimler to Lord Gwynfyd's reception. Everybody was a little silent and preoccupied, of a truth Corris had set her spell upon them. . . .

Gwynfyd house was an imposing corner building. Lord and Lady Gwynfyd received their guests at the top of the famous marble staircase which was a notable feature of the princely mansion. Lord Gwynfyd was tall, well built, clean shaven, slightly bald, but with an

interested, boyish expression, as if he found the world a very pleasant place in which to live. His wife was slight and dark, a musician and an artist. Lord Gwynfyd told Mervee he had known her mother. He was enchanted, so he said, to meet her child, and he followed his remarks up by asking her to take part in a Welsh pageant he was interested in in North Wales. He rattled on, full of enthusiasm for his schemes. He broke off abruptly ; there was a buzz of excitement ; Corris came up the staircase. Her hair was black, her face small and oval, her lips unnaturally scarlet. Darkened eyelashes half veiled her vivid violet eyes. There were jewels in her ears, a glittering band of pearls and diamonds was worn across her brow. She was introduced to Howel.

" I have wanted to meet you for ages," she exclaimed, " let us escape from the mob."

He followed her out on to the balcony which overlooked the square. It was a bower of vivid flowers. A gaily patterned awning shut out the moon and stars ; the glittering canopy of heaven above them.

" Oh, it is pleasant out here," she exclaimed. " Tell me all about Llanina Priory. Do you know," she went on earnestly, " the greatest friend I ever had was Sir Ivor Prichard."

CHAPTER XXV

YOUTH

When Corris made this declaration to Howel, he was not sure if she were joking or otherwise. Her eyes were wistful, her lips parted in their usual smile as if she were stating something more out of bravado than anything else. Two or three couples came on to the balcony, glanced in the direction of the famous singer and strolled away. . . .

For once in his life Howel was silent. As if realising his embarrassment Corris set him at his ease. But at the same time she did not hesitate to spare him the truth—that it was not interest in himself that had caused her to signal him out for her especial condescension that evening.

"Directly I heard that you were at Llanina Priory I was determined to know you," Corris explained. "Youth is a dangerous period. It sets the tune for our lives, grave or gay. When we look back, in nine cases out of ten it is the events which fashioned us then which gild or tarnish our future." She paused, gazing straight before her, as if endeavouring to choose her words. "To put it bluntly," she went on, "I wish to visit Llanina. I should like to stay at the Priory. Do you think you could work it for me? I hear that Sir Islwyn is full of his own importance, traditions, and that sort of thing. He would not look kindly upon an artist staying in his ancestral halls, no matter how talented she might be. I gathered all this from people who knew him in India."

Howel laughed: "Oh, you mustn't listen to all you hear. Sir Islwyn is one of the most chivalrous of men. It is not his fault, but his upbringing, that he has more of the soldier in him than any great interest in the arts." Howel was flattering himself that he was getting on remarkably well with this fascinating, exotic woman. "Also," he added, "he is a keen horse breeder, and then there is his daughter, his heiress."

"Yes, he has no heir," Corris murmured quietly, "that is a good thing possibly."

"A grief to him," Howel exclaimed, "however he is very keen that I should marry his daughter."

Corris showed personal interest in Howel for the first time, but she only permitted herself to say one word:

"Really!"

"Her father and mine were at Sandhurst together, and Sir Islwyn likes me. Treats me as a son."

Corris was watching him intently.

" And what does Miss Prichard say about it ? "

" Oh, you know what girls are at that age."

Corris favoured him with a low, musical laugh.

" Does she ever come to London ? "

" She is here to-night. She was talking to Lord Gwynfyd when you spoke to him."

" Oh, that pretty girl, I don't think she would help me. I rely upon you to wangle me an invitation to Llanina."

" I am sure that Sir Islwyn would be delighted."

" If there is any local charity that requires a helping hand——"

" My father would be eternally grateful if you would do something for the church restoration fund," said Howel, with a grin.

" Arrange anything you like for me," Corris said impulsively. " When first I met you this evening, I felt inclined to tell you the story of my romantic youth. I knew Sir Ivor Prichard very well indeed ; perhaps this will enable you to understand the reason I am haunted by the desire to visit what was once his home. But alas, this is not the place to talk. Will you come to dinner with me to-morrow, *tête-à-tête* ? Wednesday is my only free evening. I have an engagement on Thursday, a social one. Every other night I am singing. On Sunday I am going down into the country for a rest."

Greatly flattered by this invitation from such a famous woman, Howel readily accepted.

" Our Bird of Paradise was missing ; I came in search of her," Lord Gwynfyd exclaimed as he joined them on the balcony. " Too bad ; you are making an enemy," he laughingly protested to Howel. Corris followed her host into the crowded music room, which was one of the distinctive features of Lord Gwynfyd's town house.

Howel found Dilys and Mervee surrounded by a gay throng. Many people had sought introductions to the young Welsh heiress, whose riding had been one of the outstanding features of the Row during her visit to London. At last the hour for departure came, and once

again Mervee found herself in her hostess's luxurious car. Lady Mari was delighted with the success of her young guests, and she put her hand on Mervee's white arm :

" You looked delicious, my dear. Don't you agree ? " she appealed to Howel.

" She's always topping," he replied earnestly.

Mervee closed her eyes. She had received nothing but flattery ever since her arrival in Town, and it was dust and ashes in her mouth. What did it matter that the world thought her beautiful, when her soul was filled with longing for one who loved her not. . . .

The next evening, immaculately clad in new dress clothes which arrived that day from his tailors, Howel was shown up into Corris's handsome suite of rooms which overlooked the Embankment. Howel found himself in a languorous, perfumed atmosphere, through which Corris glowed like an entrancing vision. . . .

A recherché dinner was served, and when dessert was placed on the table, Corris said :

" I'm going to leave you for a moment if you will excuse me. I have a letter to write. Join me in the next room when you are ready," and she pushed a gold and tortoiseshell cigar-box towards him.

" Don't wait until you have finished your cigar ; I adore the smell—that is when I am not singing," she added smilingly.

Within a quarter of an hour Howel joined her. She was walking restlessly up and down the room.

" Are you going to finish the story you commenced the other night ? " asked Howel.

She regarded him with grave, critical eyes.

" The question is this : How much shall I tell you ? "

" Start," said Howel lightly, " and we can see how we get along."

" I told you that poor Ivor was a friend of mine. Is it wise to show one's heart to a stranger ? "

" Why regard me as a stranger ? " Howel urged. " Why

not a friend? Won't you trust me? If you are anxious to visit the Priory, and I can bring it off, it would be best, as you have told me so much, to tell me all. You will find that I can play the game as well as any man you know."

There was a tense silence for a moment. "I'm afraid you'll think me mad," Corris said, "when I tell you that I was forced by some odd invisible power to make this effort to visit Llanina. It is almost as if I am driven there against my will. I have important European contracts to fulfil that will keep me a couple of years out of England when my present season ends at Covent Garden." And she added half banteringly, "Perhaps it is because I treated Ivor badly. I don't know."

Howel looked curiously at Corris's sleek, bent head. He had heard much about the artistic temperament, of its exaggerated outlook, therefore he did not take her conversation too seriously.

"Let us sit down. Let us talk." Howel dropped into the black-satin covered chesterfield at her side.

"I had only been in New York a few days when I read of Ivor's death. I had seen him a week or two previously." She hesitated, as if endeavouring to choose her words. "I'll start from the beginning. My father was a Non-conformist minister in central Wales. I had a voice, and the squire of our parish, Sir Merrick Lloyd, was a rich man, a great patron of the Welsh arts. He sent me to Paris to be trained. I came out at the Opera House. A French singer named Lavalle, of European renown, fell in love with me, and I, dazzled by his position, married him. But it was a deadly failure. I left him when I was eighteen. Some time after, I heard from his agents that he was going to the Argentine to stay with an old friend of his, the Marquis de Salis; that he had become a bankrupt; that my allowance from him was stopped." Corris paused.

"Oh, it is foolish of me to review the past. It is so poignant, so near to me, as if it only happened yesterday.

" Oh, do go on," Howel begged.

Corris put her white, jewelled hands to her dark hair, smoothing it gently with her fingers. " My only excuse for boring you like this is the one I have already explained: I am compelled to go to Llanina. Sometimes I believe that it is only a sentimental desire on my part, to see Ivor's old home. But, at other times, especially in the night, this idea becomes a sort of obsession. I have told my doctor about it, and I have said to him : ' I wonder if it is this same hidden force which sends the murderer back to visit the scenes of his crime ? ' "

" Of course he laughed at you," said Howel. He was filled with curiosity. He wanted to know the truth from another point of view, for the thought suggested itself to his mercenary mind : " One never knows, this curious sort of confession might be useful to me one day," and so he turned to her cautiously :

" It isn't fair to tell me so much and then to break off at one of the most interesting parts of the story. For instance, your meeting with Sir Ivor."

" Then I will treat you as a friend," said Corris, " and you will help me to get to the Priory ? "

" You can rely on me."

" On hearing of Lavalle's bankruptcy I was very upset to find myself bound to a man who could not support me," Corris went on. " I had no wish to go back to poverty in central Wales ; also, during my last year in Paris my father had died. I came to England. One night I was asked to sing at a Welsh dinner in London ; the story of my success in Paris had preceded me. At first I could not make up my mind to sing on such an occasion, but my agent was an astute man. The old squire who had financed my musical education in Paris wrote to me and said that as he was to be present he hoped that I would sing. ' Fine publicity, a good newspaper story,' urged my agent ; ' besides one never knows where an engagement of this sort may lead one. All sorts of influential persons will be present, including Royalty.'

And so I fell in with their wishes. The sight moved me strangely," Corris said, " I looked down from the gallery upon all sorts and conditions of men and women. Rich and poor, successful and unsuccessful, gathered together between four walls because they were sons and daughters of Wales, loving their country just as I loved it. No matter how far a woman may be carried away from old Cambria, her Welsh blood is her proudest possession."

" Yes, yes, go on," begged Howel, for he was afraid she would leave off abruptly at the most thrilling part of the story.

" To prove to Sir Merrick Lloyd," smiled Corris, " that he had not sent me to Paris for nothing, I showed off. I sang the ' Jewel Song ' from *Faust*, and oh, my dear, it was a great triumph for me. They said that nobody had ever had such applause at one of these vast gatherings before. It seemed that a thousand voices called my name. You see they wished me to sing in Welsh, so I sang them songs that my father had taught me. Songs which I used to sing at the local concerts, organised to take place after the tea parties that are such a feature of Welsh non-conformity," she laughed softly. " All these reminiscences make me remember things which I thought I had forgotten. But youth, happy youth, is the best time after all. So I sang ' David of the White Rock,' ' All Through The Night.' I thought they would never let me stop singing. Afterwards I was presented to the Royal guest. Sir Merrick Lloyd, poor old man, was weeping for joy at my success. He was airing his pet theory. ' This is my argument, the proof,' said he, ' that the Royal National Eisteddfod should make it one of its chief aims to found a fund to send brilliant artists like Corris, who had not sufficient money of their own, to finish their musical career abroad.' And then someone interrupted, ' I say, Merrick, but you must not forget your promise, you know, to introduce me to your protégée.' I glanced at the speaker—and my heart was his ! He was tall, with black hair, an enchanting face and an alluring manner, and

some inner consciousness made me realise one thing, that rightly or wrongly here was my fate. Any way I fell in love with him at first sight. The man who had deserted me and left me to go off to the Argentine was forgotten. 'Permit me to introduce Sir Ivor Prichard to you, Corris, Nightingale of Wales.' It was mutual on both sides. Within a week Ivor asked me to be his wife. I had to tell him of my unfortunate marriage. He was upset; he went off to Wales and would not see me again. Within a few months a newspaper was sent to me containing an obituary notice heavily marked, and I read that Lavalle had died in the Argentine, and I was free. By this time I was fixed up with all sorts of American and Continental engagements, so I could not remain in England. I wrote to Ivor and told him what had happened. He came straight up to London; he pressed our immediate marriage. But there were certain terms and conditions in some of my American contracts. I consented to a quiet wedding on condition it was kept secret for a time. I had already discovered that it was not wise for an ambitious artist to have a husband! Ivor fell in with my wishes, although, on marriage, he urged me to give up my profession. Of course I refused. We were married early one morning at a register-office in the Strand. For six months he more or less accompanied me wherever I went, and then trouble began. He was jealous of every man who came near to me. He was jealous of my profession. He constantly urged me to throw it up and live a quiet life with him in Wales, but the fever of success was in my blood; the adulation of the crowd meant more than all the world to me; and we had a serious quarrel. He was a man who never forgave. It seemed as if he suddenly hated me just as much as he had loved me. . . . I thought, 'Success will compensate me for love; I will become one of the greatest singers in the world,' and so you see fame is not easily won."

After a slight pause Corris went on:

"He said things to me when I last saw him that a

woman of my temperament never forgives or forgets. Besides, the world was at my feet; I was just off to fulfil contracts in America. Ivor accused me of unfaithfulness; that I had a secret lover; that if he could he would 'get rid of me.' In my blind fury I told him that: 'Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to set him free.' He went white with rage, and bade me to take care that I never brought disgrace upon his name. I thought I hated him then. A woman is often cheated by her emotions, and I was no less a woman than the rest. Ivor was different to the other men who crowded around me. I adored him, but I knew that if I gave way and showed him the true state of my feelings, my power would be gone. I was wise enough to realise that my real fascination for Ivor lay in my apparent indifference to him and his changing moods. I guessed that he was the type of man who would quickly tire of a woman who was prepared to abandon herself, body, soul, and spirit. . . . I went to New York, and I thought, 'When I come back I'll make it up with him. The old tonic of absence, absence which makes the heart grow fonder, will be the best thing in the world for both of us.' I had tremendous successes. After the show one night a card was sent in from the Marquis de Salis, Lavalle's friend. He was shown in. There were a number of people about. 'You must all go,' I cried out, 'an old friend is coming to see me.' The Marquis was delighted to meet me again. I accepted his invitation to supper. It is always pleasant to talk of old times. Everything was very charming—the food, the wine, excellent. Suddenly the Marquis exclaimed: 'Weren't those obituary notices of Lavalle's death amusing. We planned them all out together. One day,' de Salis went on, Lavelle came to me and said, 'I am going to die for the benefit of my creditors; then I shall go to Timbuctoo, or some such place, until it is safe for me to return to life again.' And so I found out that my marriage to Ivor was illegal. Yielding to an overpowering

impulse, I wrote and told him the truth, believing that he would pity me, and suggest that I should get rid of a man who had treated me so badly in my youth. Within a short time Ivor wrote me a curt letter to say that he was in love with another woman. I was furious, for I never intended to let him go out of my life. I sent him a cablegram declaring that my information was incorrect; that my husband was dead, and that therefore my marriage to him held good. I left New York and went to London, and met Ivor by appointment. He told me he had gone through a form of marriage with a Welsh girl; that they had a son; that he could not stand a scandal. He offered me a thousand a year for life if I would not make our marriage known. I refused the money. I loved him. That very night I came face to face with Lavalle. He had sunk into the lowest depths of poverty. He was selling matches in Bond Street. He had cheated us all for years; but within a week he died of pneumonia in a nursing-home in London."

"What is your real reason for wishing to visit Llanina?" Howel asked.

"To meet Sir Islwyn Prichard," Corris said agitatedly. "Sometimes in the night I am afraid. Somewhere is Ivor's son. Don't you see my jealousy kept that boy out of his birthright? He is the baronet, wherever he may be. I thought that perhaps you might help me to find out if anybody in the district knew of a marriage between Ivor and this girl. A woman's curiosity."

Howel lit a cigarette, and the old and ever present thought came to his mind: "What am I going to make out of this?" and at last he said slowly:

"I am Sir Islwyn's agent. This sort of thing would not do me heaps of good."

Corris smiled, and congratulated herself that she had gauged her man accurately.

"We might come to some sort of understanding? Young men nowadays have expensive tastes. When I

want to gratify my curiosity, money is of absolutely no consideration to me."

"I could swear Sir Ivor never married," Howel declared. "But I'll make discreet enquiries; I won't leave a stone unturned. You have only to command, I'll obey"; and bending forward he kissed her jewelled fingers.

Half an hour later he was bowling along in a taxi to Lady Mari's house. She had taken her guests to a theatre. They all arrived on the doorstep about the same time. Howel followed Mervee up the staircase, and he caught her up just as she was entering the drawing-room.

"You are looking awfully posh to-night," he said. "By the way, Corris is anxious to see Llanina. Could you get your father to ask her to the Priory?"

"Perhaps," Mervee answered; "if she wouldn't want too much waiting upon. I think father's feeling lonely. I told Lady Mari this evening that I must return to Llanina to-morrow, but of course, there is no reason at all why you should come."

"That's not true," he retorted warmly. "I always want to be where you are."

"What about Corris?" Mervee asked mischievously.

"Corris? Do you know——"

"That she's irresistible, of course I do." And she thought, "I wonder if Gareth would be as quickly infatuated with her as he is?"

CHAPTER XXVI

"PLEASE DON'T"

And in the mean season Ceinwyn was using every artifice in her power to bring Gareth to her feet. They were frequently seen riding about the country together. They

had visited Pant y Cariad, the place where Gareth was born. Together they had stood beneath the great stone arches and studied the splendour of the sweeping vale that stretched before them—a magnificent panorama of mountain, lake and stream.

Gwyn Vaughan was elated at the course events were taking. Up to this time Gareth had insisted that the news of his inheritance should be kept quiet.

" I want to talk it over with my uncle," said he, " and then I will bring him here to have a look round the estate."

" Well, well, don't stay long away," Vaughan exclaimed, for he did not feel altogether happy when the young squire was out of his sight. Ceinwyn hoped that he would ask her to accompany him to Llanina.

" It will be lonely here while you are away. I am dying to meet the Archdruid. Would he be very angry if you took me with you? I could tell him how splendidly we ride together. I would sing to him." When she saw that Gareth did not take the hint, she exclaimed half defiantly, " Sometimes I think I shall go back to London. I heard the other day that Corris was coming to sing at Llanina for the church or something of the sort. I shall get at her and persuade her to give me some introductions. If I only got into a chorus it would be better than becoming a cabbage. Gareth, would you miss me a little bit."

He flushed; he hardly knew how to answer her. He could not disguise the fact from himself that she had been good to him, at a time when he required human sympathy more than anything else in the world.

" Of course, I should miss you! "

" Be quick back, any way," Ceinwyn retorted.

Gareth did not write and tell Llio of his proposed visit. He was in an exultant mood. Maes y Groes might be his own property, but there was no place in the world so fair to Gareth as his old home.

It was late afternoon when he reached the grey stone house that was so dear to him. Lisi was what

she called " straightening things up " when Gareth walked in.

" Well, well, didn't I tell the master you'd be home before the end of the week," she cried excitedly, " but he only laughed at me, boy bach, when I told him that I had seen you coming up the path in my teacup. The other morning I pointed you out to Teivi after I had drained my cup and turned it upside down. When I looked inside there was the picture of a man in a peaked cap. But wherever did you get your new clothes? Champion they are, as if they came from London."

Gareth laughed.

" You will never grow up, Lisi," he declared, for ever since Gareth could remember Lisi had been ready to tell fortunes when tea-leaves patterned the sides and bottom of the teacup.

" The preacher is in the garden," said Lisi. " It is no good whatever hiding one fact from you. Sad is the master when you go from Carreg Ina. Well, indeed, don't I know what it is like myself, and Miss Mervee fach away too ! "

Gareth coloured, but he made no answer. He was glad that Mervee was not in the district, and yet secretly he knew that there was nothing for which he longed so much as the sight of her face. But of what use were these reflections to him. He couldn't marry Mervee, why then torture himself with thoughts of her. Then the memory of Ceinwyn came to him, Ceinwyn with her artless smile. She was a good pal. Could she be any more to him than that? And yet if he married her, would she not provide him with a chance, a small, remote chance of forgetting Mervee, the forbidden fruit?

Llio was out of doors writing a poem. He was seated in a sheltered nook in the rock garden that overlooked the bay. At the sound of a footstep on the gravelled path he sprang up, and his glad cry rang out :

" Why, boy bach, I was wondering when you were

going to have a day off. You said very little in answer to my last letter. I was afraid that you were unhappy, but——" Llio stopped abruptly. He looked critically at Gareth, and he was struck with what he had not noticed before. Breeding and refinement were marked upon his clean-cut features; for a moment it was as if Gareth had become a stranger to Llio. The thought throbbed in the old man's brain. "Who is the father of this fine man?" It was a troubled reflection, a secret nightmare which even prayer could not banish from his mind.

Gareth, slightly disturbed by his preoccupied manner, said, "Why, what is wrong with me, is it my new suit of clothes? Lisi spotted them at once."

"Well, well, perhaps that is it," Llio admitted.

"What do you mean?"

"I hardly know," Llio answered. "At first I thought you had changed," and he smiled in his whimsical way; "grown better looking than ever I could imagine. Now what do you think of that flattery from an old man? How do you like your job? How long are you staying, over the week-end, eh? We are going to have some fine singing at Nazareth on Sunday. By the way, do you know you have never yet told me exactly what your job is at Maes y Groes?" In his excitement Llio rattled off one question after another, and Gareth smiled:

"Where am I to commence? You have asked a hundred and one things; which shall I answer first? Well, maybe you would like to know how long I am staying. That depends entirely on yourself, for I want you to come back to Maes y Groes with me."

"I see," said Llio thoughtfully, for his keen perceptive powers were quick to observe that Gareth was keeping something back from him. "I should like to come very much, but I am very busy just at present. It is no easy task to become Archdruid of Wales. Letters come to me from Welshmen all over the world, and I try to answer every one of them. They say, 'It is like a bit of

old Wales to get a line from you,' for although ambitious Welshmen wander far afield they never forget their old country, the land of mountain and flood."

" Yes, indeed, I know what it feels like to be out of Wales with the love of it burning in your heart. Sometimes I think that love of country comes next to one's love of woman."

" Mervee is still dear to you ? "

" Well, yes, indeed, my heart's blood."

" I have come to the conclusion that no man has the right to rule the life of his child as Sir Islwyn is doing," Llio said harshly. " If you want Mervee——"

" I do, but I can't marry her."

" Don't tell me that there is some hidden secret in your life as there was in Morvydd's."

" But there is. Oh, I can t bear it any longer. Shall I tell you straight away why I cannot marry Mervee——"

And then a girl's trembling voice cried out :

" Please don't. I thought you were alone. I have only just come back from London. I came straight here to see Llio." Gareth turned and looked upon Mervee's white face.

CHAPTER XXVII

NOT ALWAYS FAIR

Love is not always fair—a pleasant potion, whipping the emotions into sublime ecstasy. Ofttimes Love is an elusive phantom that leads the feet of men into chill caverns of despair and across burning deserts of ungratified desire. Love is not always kind ; it is as hurtful as a two-edged sword. It lacerates ; it blinds the eyes to clear perceptions. It is an intolerable obsession which

gives neither peace nor joy, be it reciprocated, or denied. . . .

All the torments of longing to break down barriers and take Mervee into his arms swept over Gareth when he heard her bitter cry.

Llio turned helplessly from one to the other. These two people whom he loved were buffeted by the ocean of passion. Separated by a tantalising fate that had changed Gareth from an ardent lover to a care-stricken man.

"Mervee dear," cried Llio, "welcome home to old Llanina. I was afraid you would come back a fashionable lady of nineteen twenty-six," he went on, trying to gloss over a decidedly awkward situation. Turning his back on Gareth, he placed his hands on the girl's shoulders, studying her pale, quivering features! You are just the same Mervee. Even Mayfair could not turn the sweet daffodil into a scented gardenia."

She was grateful to him. She knew that he was trying to give her time to recover herself. And as for Gareth, he turned aside, gazing across the bay with unseeing eyes. Oh, to be near her was exquisite pain—a pain which maddened him, because the time arises when even bondage to the wishes of the dead becomes intolerable.

Impulsively Gareth brushed his hands across his forehead. Oh, could he ever forget the pleading of his mother's heart-broken letter? And yet the fires of youth were in his veins. Happiness is the natural heritage of man. Why should this priceless gift be denied to him—the love of man for woman. The joy of a home to be shared together, the sanctity of a sheltered nook over which the chill world had no dominion, wherein the flowers of confidence and trust for ever blossom. What was the vast wealth of Maes y Groes to Gareth without this slip of a girl whom he had enshrined in his soul; and as he thought his face darkened, and a rebellious hatred against the hardship of his lot swept over him. Oh, why

should so much be given unto him and yet so little. The crown without the priceless jewel—the cage without the singing bird. Fate was relentless. Life was relentless. And then he thought of Ceinwyn—Ceinwyn who flung her sex across his path.

Mervee broke the awful silence.

"I know your love has turned to hate. I have not forgotten the night we parted in the tower. I told you then that I did not want you unless you wanted me." And then she turned to Llio. "I thought you were alone. I have not come here to run after Gareth!"

"Oh, my dear, my dear," cried Llio, "do I not know this? He is hiding something from me, Mervee. This nephew of mine will not trust me. I am ashamed."

"Why blame him? If we could order our love like a grocer his goods, why then indeed it would not be love at all." And she turned to Gareth and said: "I have never willingly hurt you. I have forgiven you for any suffering that you have cast into my life, but at least we can be friends."

He turned upon her savagely; his face was white and distorted, his eyes blazing; he could no longer control himself. Her beauty mocked him, tortured him—filled him with longing.

"No, I can never be your friend," he said harshly. "People who have been lovers can never be friends," he ended defiantly. "Besides, there is another woman." And without another word he strode out into the garden.

Llio stood motionless, stricken, unable to look upon the girl whom Gareth sought to wound. He felt Mervee's gentle hand upon his arm, and her voice reached him faintly:

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what, Mervee fach? Well, indeed, this is the first I have heard about it," he said miserably. "Now I know why he wished me to go with him to Maes

y Groes. It must be somebody he met there. It is shameful. He is unworthy of your love."

"Perhaps so," she muttered hoarsely; "but it is his all the same. I have tried to forget him, but I found it impossible to do so. When lovers came to me I could only see one man, Gareth"—and she pointed to the photograph that was hanging upon the wall—"as I first saw him in his old peaked cap. He is dear to me. I cannot tear the memory out of my heart. Now I have said these things to you," she sighed, "forget them. I am ashamed of my weakness—and yet I know that it is the weakness of love that makes it strong. Oh," she ended passionately, "if only I could hate him! Indeed I should be free."

"There is no freedom in hatred," Llio answered. "There is only restlessness and a never-ceasing pain. I cannot help you, Mervee dear. Perhaps God will." He stopped, and kissed her on the forehead.

Sadly Mervee turned away from him.

"You will not desert me altogether?" Llio asked pleadingly. "Gareth is going back to Maes y Groes, and I will do as he wishes—spend one night there. And when I return, will you come here?"

Mervee promised. "But I'm going to Maes y Groes too, to the show. You know, I am riding a new mare." She was making a desperate effort to comfort Llio. "It is not fair," she thought, "that he should be worried because love has taken his wings from me." "I have a new riding-coat and breeches, and a pretty hat, all very smart in beige colour," Mervee confided, surreptitiously brushing the tears away from her eyes, hoping to cheat Llio with her gay mood. "Now I am going to be your old Mervee again—think no more of my sorrow." She went to the door; for a moment she paused, and then she came back. "Tell me some day,' she whispered tremulously, "what the other girl is like."

Llio nodded, but he could not speak. "Well, indeed,"

he thought, "she may have the daring of a boy, but her heart will always be the heart of a woman."

He sank down heavily in his favourite chair before the window after she had gone. He was grieved that Gareth had sprung this surprise upon him. A sense of revulsion against this unknown woman swept over him—this woman who had come between Gareth and Mervee far more completely than the obstacles which Sir Islwyn had sought to put between his daughter and her impecunious suitor. These latter obstacles were of a material nature. But when human flesh, human passion, is the subtle barrier, it is not easy to break it down, especially if the two people most concerned in the problem are not prepared to let one another go. Llio never knew how long he remained in his room, a prey to unhappy reverie, until the clock chimed the hour. "Strange," he thought to himself, "that Gareth does not come." He went out into the passage and called him, and Lisi, hearing the call, said:

"Well, indeed, he is out in the garden. He went there when Miss Mervee was with you, and he has not come back!"

Llio passed out along the sunlit path. He expected to find Gareth seated on the low stone wall, from whence there was such a remarkable view of Llanina, but, to his surprise, there was no sign of him. Turning aside, he went up a path that led to a shady tree, a spot which Llio loved when the sun was hot. He stopped abruptly. Lying face downwards, with his head buried in his arms, was Gareth. Llio hesitated for a moment, hardly knowing what to do. The anger melted from his heart as quickly as it had come. Stooping down, he sought to raise his nephew.

"What is it, my boy? You are ill. Speak to me." And then it was that Gareth looked up, and Llio drew back with an exclamation of astonishment, for his face was wet with much weeping.

"Can't you leave me alone!" he cried savagely.

"Yes, yes, of course, if you wish it," Llio answered, still struggling with his uneasy surprise. "This is not the way for a successful lover to behave. You haven't made a mistake?"

Gareth sprang to his feet. "No, my mind is made up."

"Who is the girl?"

For a moment Gareth hesitated. He felt as if a noose was being placed around his neck when he said:

"Ceinwyn, the niece of Gwyn Vaughan, the lawyer. She wanted to come here with me to-day, and I thought that it would be best perhaps if I came alone."

"To break the ice, as it were," said Llio, and he regarded Gareth steadily; and he added, "But why these marks of suffering on your face? You are sure that you are not allowing your pride to come between you and your birthright?"

"You mean?"

"Mervee's love. You have forfeited it?"

"Yes," Gareth answered. "It is possibly the best thing I have done."

"You cannot deceive me," said Llio harshly. "You have got into some entanglement with this girl—compromised her. You are obliged to marry her—that is what you are trying to explain."

"No."

"But there is something that you were going to tell me when Mervee broke in upon us. What is it, my boy?"

There was a long silence, and Gareth paced slowly backwards and forwards, fighting out the battle with himself. The time had come when it would be no longer possible to keep the truth away from Llio.

"Let us go into the study."

The two men walked slowly into the house. Gareth threw himself into a chair before the fireplace, and Llio remained standing near to the window. The sweeping waters of the vast Atlantic gave him fortitude and inspiration.

"The night I was twenty-one," Gareth commenced abruptly, "I knew the name of my father."

"Are you going to hurt me?"

"You know a great deal already," Gareth answered quietly. "You knew the damnable truth that I was nameless. My mother was not married to my father."

"God, oh, God, have mercy!"

"But surely in your heart you did know the truth?"

"Did you not tell me that she had been destroyed," Llio muttered.

"A man tricked my mother into what she believed was marriage. She regarded this man as her husband, until after I was born. Then came the truth. She was disgraced, humiliated. That is why she drowned herself," said Gareth.

Llio raised his head, and he cried out: "Let us find that man, for is it not written an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!"

"The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind," Gareth retorted grimly. "My father lost his life in trying to save my mother. In her letter she charged me never to have anything to do with a family to which her betrayer belonged."

"Yes, and she was right," said Llio firmly.

"Yes, she was right, and hap you are right, uncle bach; but both you and she forget that the blood of that family is as much in my veins as the blood that comes from my mother's people."

"Complex—it is all complex," Llio groaned; "but there are circumstances that cannot be disregarded, the wishes of the dead."

"And for that reason," said Gareth, "I am filling the aching of my soul with Ceinwyn, and I am thrusting Mervee aside—with all her sweetness—with all her tenderness—because my father was a Prichard."

"A Prichard! Oh, no, no!" cried Llio. "It would be too great a wrong. There must be some mistake."

"Sir Islwyn's cousin, Ivor Prichard, was my father."

Llio's question was almost a whisper when he reasoned.

"But how did they meet? He was so frequently abroad. He did not mix with the people. He was a proud man; and Morvydd, she was timid, shy——"

Gareth laughed harshly.

"Then love changes a woman strangely, for passion destroyed her."

"I see, it is the shadow of Morvydd who came between you two; and you cannot tell Mervee."

"Why should I proclaim my mother's shame north, south, east, and west?" cried Gareth.

"Why, indeed?"

"I have not been working at Maes y Groes," Gareth went on abruptly. "I have been living with Ceinwyn's uncle. I met her at his house, Hengwrt. The estate of Maes y Groes belongs to me. I am rich enough to buy up Sir Islwyn and everything else upon his land. Rich enough to buy his daughter. I am the richest man in the principality."

"My boy, why this boasting? You are out of your senses to talk this way to me."

Gareth unbuttoned his coat, and from his pocket he drew a typewritten copy of Sir Ivor Prichard's will. "This is the reason why I want you to come to Maes y Groes. We will stay with Mr. Vaughan. He is the agent for the estate—my agent."

"So," said Llio, "it is his desire that you should marry his niece?" For once in his life there was something sardonic in the manner in which he asked the question.

"At any rate, I will found a family."

"You cannot take this money," Llio cried. "Don't you understand it is nothing more or less than blood money, the price of your mother's life."

"I thought so at one time," Gareth replied; "but the will was made long before my mother lost her life. There were other documents too, made out in her favour, but she would not take a penny."

"Morvydd came of fine stock," said Llio; "and can her son do less? Write straight away to this man Vaughan and tell him that you renounce all claim to the Maes y Groes Estate."

"Very well, and if I refuse it? What then? Oh, you don't understand, uncle. Something strange has come to me. I cannot hate my father. I have tried to do so. But we have only heard one side of the story. Perhaps he thought that he was free—perhaps——"

"Odd is your talk," Llio interrupted coldly. "He bequeathed you his wealth, but you were not good enough to bear his name. I now understand why you could not marry Mervee. You must hate the very name of Prichard, as I do! . . . Oh, God, forgive me! Is it not written somewhere in the Book that there is such a thing as righteous wrath, and great is my wrath against these people; so great indeed that you shall not touch their money."

"You will come back to Maes y Groes with me. The place where I was born is on the estate."

"Better were it razed to the ground," cried Llio harshly, "for is it not a monument proclaiming your illegitimacy? Touch this money and, much as I love you, you will be dead to me."

The two men talked far into the night, but Llio was relentless in his decision.

The following morning Gareth set out alone to Maes y Groes. He went straight to the lawyer's office. Gwyn Vaughan was in an excellent humour. He was delighted to see "the young squire back home again," to use his own words.

"Ceinwyn, poor girl," said he, "has been like a fish out of water. She's fond of you."

Gareth ignored his remark.

"You have advanced me one hundred pounds out of the estate, and I have spent fifty pounds. I must pay the sum back to the estate. My uncle has strong

views. If I accept this inheritance it will mean a breach between us."

"My dear boy," Gwyn Vaughan cried out in horror, taking his handkerchief out of his pocket and passing it over his forehead. "What folly is this, to throw a great sum of money into the gutter? What, indeed, would Sir Ivor say, if he knew that you were treating him in this fashion?" But before he could say another word the door was pushed open and Ceinwyn entered. When she saw Gareth her face was wrinkled up in smiles.

"Splendid, splendid to see you back!" she cried. "I have been down into the field where they are putting up stands for the horse-jumping. Will you take me there?" Her red, pouting, provocative lips came very near to his own. Gareth could feel her warm breath on his face, and, because he was lonely, sick at heart, she seemed to suggest the old lure that he had experienced once before. He wanted sympathy, and here it was, and Mervee. . . . How he wished that this tantalising mirage of Mervee would not mock him at a moment when he was trying to blot her out of his memory. . . .

Gwyn Vaughan fingered his chin, and gazed at the young couple over the top of his glasses, and very quietly he left the room.

"Oh, Ceinwyn," Gareth cried helplessly, "I am very unhappy!" The next moment he felt the warmth of her bare arm as it was slipped around his neck.

"Boy bach," she smiled, "I wish I could make you happy."

"Oh, try!" Gareth cried desperately. "Save me from myself!" And when he uttered these words Ceinwyn thought, "It is just as my uncle feared. The Archdruid has been persuading him to renounce his fortune." And she said with more earnestness than she had ever used in her voice before:

"Oh, indeed, I will save you from yourself."

She pressed his head against her bosom and kissed his thick black hair. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

SQUIRE OF MAES Y GROES

THE National Eisteddfod was to be held only a few miles away from Llanina, at Tyglyn, a market town that was set in a valley surrounded by hills and a vast marsh. Near by there were large aluminium works, which gave employment to many hundreds of young Welshmen, and thus the male voice choirs of Tyglyn were famous throughout Wales. Corris had declared that she wished to see something of the picturesque proceedings of the Gorsedd, and one day Howel, not forgetful of the great singer's promises to him, had dropped the hint to his father.

"It would be fine indeed," the vicar exclaimed, "if she would do something for the church restoration fund," and then the subject was discussed with Sir Islwyn.

"She is wonderful," said Mervee, for she was only too delighted to divert Howel's attention from herself, even if it was only momentary. "She wants to see Llanina."

"Singers and actresses are not much in my line," Sir Islwyn retorted, "but if it will amuse you to have one of these artistic people about the place, ask her down."

"You will find her a very interesting personality," said Howel.

Thus it came to pass that Mervee wrote to Corris, and the latter received her coveted invitation to Llanina Priory, which she promptly accepted. At the same time Sir Islwyn wrote to Lady Mari Wynne and asked her to make one of his house party for the Eisteddfod.

"Might just as well kill two birds with one stone," he decided, as for a long period he had also wished to entertain some of his old friends, who were now home on leave from India.

The squire was seated at breakfast one morning with Mervee; whilst turning over the pages of the newspaper, he gave an exclamation of surprise.

"By Jove! Listen to this," and he commenced to read: "A romance that can easily be labelled 'stranger than fiction' is the story of Maes y Groes. It is a fine estate of unparalleled beauty, possessing a valley rich in mineral wealth. For many years this valuable property has been held in trust by the well-known solicitors, Vaughan & Vaughan, of Maes y Groes. On attaining his majority the heir received a letter from Mr. Gwyn Vaughan asking him to come and see him. He went, presumably believing that he was about to offer him work on the estate, but to his surprise he was told that he was the Squire of Maes y Groes, with its vast wealth, the latter the result of carefully invested funds by a distant connection. The young Squire, Mr. Gareth Elys, who has come into possession of this princely heritage, is the nephew of the distinguished Archdruid of Wales, the Reverend Llio Elys, whose miraculous recovery from blindness has aroused much discussion and interest. But the fascinating real-life romance does not end here, for the squire fell in love with Miss Ceinwyn Rees, the beautiful niece of his agent and lawyer. It is rumoured that the marriage will take place shortly. Pant y Cariad, a fine old mansion on the Maes y Groes property, which was partially destroyed by fire many years ago, is to be restored by Mr. Gareth Elys, and it will ultimately be used as one of his Welsh residences."

Sir Islwyn threw the paper on to the table. Mervee, white as the snows which tip Clawdd Coch when the wind blows across from the north, covered her face with her hands. She had fought to hide her agitation, and failed. . . .

"What a story!" There was disgust, regret, a hundred and one conflicting emotions passed through Sir Islwyn's mind when he uttered these words. In his heart he thought: "Heavens above, why had I not some powers of discernment? Why did I allow a prize like this to slip through my fingers? Besides, Mervee loved him; it would have been ideal. What Elys lacked in family and tradition, Mervee could have given him, and what Llanina Priory lacked to make it one of the finest estates in the Principality he could have provided." Aloud he said: "So this Gareth Elys would have been a fine match for you, after all. These Vaughans have played their cards well. Hot-headed youth is foolish enough for anything. This lawyer chap has flung his niece across the path of the too impressionable young squire." Sir Islwyn chuckled when he uttered the three last words, which gave a sort of cynical twist to his phrase "the young squire." "Now is your chance, Mervee. Pity to let this other girl sweep up the dollars. Take it from me, a man may have many adventures, but there is only one woman for whom he has a lasting affection."

Mervee sprang up, the room swayed around her. She tried to fight off the deadly sensation that everything was fading away from her, and just at this minute Howel entered.

"Called to see if you'd come for a canter," he said. "They have added a new cup to the Maes y Groes list of prizes. The solicitor, Gwyn Vaughan, has been sending notices around; it is called the Pant y Cariad cup, given by the man who has just come into the property. You'll have to compete for that, Mervee. It is a gold cup. You must bring it home to Llanina."

"We've just been discussing the new squire of Maes y Groes," said Sir Islwyn tersely; and he chose a cigar and lit it carefully. "By the way, read the story for yourself." He tossed the paper across to Howel. There was a tense silence whilst Howel read the paragraph.

"Well I'm damned!" he ejaculated, then he turned to Mervee, laughed and said shortly: "Sorry. . . . All the same, this will make the horse jumping at Maes y Groes doubly interesting."

Mervee longed to cry out:

"Oh, can't you see that you are torturing me? I don't want to go to the horse jumping. I only want to be left alone!"

Sir Islwyn went out of the room to give some orders to a gardener who was waiting in the hall. Finding himself alone with Mervee, Howel said earnestly:

"Why don't you fall in with your father's wishes, and as I wish most of all. Marry me. Everybody seems to be settling down except you and I. Even if you can't feel desperate love for me, at least we have much in common."

"I should hate night clubs and the life you lead."

"If I married you, I would abandon such things," he declared. "I would devote myself to you. I would breed horses."

"Bought with Lady Mari's money," Mervee interrupted.

"I'm her godchild. Why shouldn't she set me up with a couple of hunters if she wants to do so? She liked you awfully, Mervee. She told me that she had no desire to see me waiting for dead men's shoes. That on the day I married you she would make me an allowance of a thousand a year—not bad for a start, because, of course, as Sir Islwyn says, our home would be here at the Priory."

"You have been discussing my future pretty freely with my father and your aunt," said Mervee furiously, "but I don't intend to embark upon a marriage of convenience. Please say no more about it."

"You can't care for this man, Gareth Elys, a low, ill-tempered fellow. However, he is well away from here!"

"Keeps his eyes open too wide—is that what you mean?" Mervee asked coldly. "However, perhaps

it would be just as well for you to know that he is not the only man who is keeping his eyes open with regard to the smuggling that is going on around this neighbourhood."

Howel changed colour.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think I don't know why you hang about the quay, the reason that you are so anxious on certain nights, the reason why you surreptitiously go out with the mackerel fleet? Knowing these things, do you seriously believe I would marry you? I am not warning you for your own sake. I would let you drift on to your doom if I were not sorry for your father."

"What do you know?"

"In the tower one night. Oh, yes, I still go there," said Mervee, as she noticed a look of surprise pass over his features, "not to meet a lover," she added quietly, "not to pry upon your movements, but because I love the place."

"Damn that hole!" Howel interposed coarsely.

"I was looking out across the sea, when I saw two coastguards. They were half hidden by the gorse, and I heard them talking. They were watching for a small boat, and they are searching for a tall man. I heard them say that new information had come down from London."

"Thanks for the tip," said Howel, "but why you should honour me with half-veiled threats, God only knows!"

"I have warned you. If I really thought that you intended to persist in this drug traffic, I would give you away. If I were questioned I should not hesitate. You tried to ruin Gareth——"

"That's where you are wrong," Howel lied, seeking to get into her good books again. "I tried to save him. Any way, he does not require your good services, or mine, in future. Give me a little sympathy"; and he turned on her with a gesture of despair. "I don't ask for your love, Mervee, not at first. It would come all right in time. Marriage alters a man."

" It doesn't stop his faithlessness, if he is weak," said Mervee. " Weakness in a man is intolerable. I think, of the two, vice would be more preferable. At any rate it would show some sort of strength. Oh," she cried wearily, " I am tired of talking of these things ! " and then recklessly, because she didn't know what to do with herself, she added, " I'll get into my riding kit ; I'll try the new mare. I'll bring back the Pant y Cariad cup to the Priory, if I die in the attempt."

But there was no smile on Howel's face when she left the room ; for one thing he was disturbed by the warning which he had received from Mervee, and secondly, her depression, her excitement, her defiance, made him remark uneasily as he lit his cigarette : " She cares for him still. Heavens above, how I hate that man ! If only I could crush him, destroy him utterly ! " His face was ugly with revengeful passion as he made his way to the stables.

CHAPTER XXIX

THERE IS NO GIRL

GARETH never knew how he glided into that engagement of his with Ceinwyn. In his misery he had found some comfort in the warmth of her caress. When Gwyn Vaughan re-entered his private office, on the day of Gareth's return from his visit to the Archdruid, he closed the door quietly behind him. For a moment a smile of satisfaction lit up his keen features—a smile of gratified triumph. His niece was as shrewd as a man, albeit she possessed the lure of a woman.

There stood Ceinwyn with her arms around Gareth's neck, her face nestling against his tweed coat, and Gareth, very pale, like a creature carved in stone, with

his hands hanging down at his sides, irresponsive to her caresses.

"Not an ardent lover," thought Vaughan; "a bit shy, but time will change all that." Ceinwyn's sharp ears heard the click of the door, and she turned a triumphant, flushed face towards her uncle.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she cried. "We are going to be married."

"Dear me, that's fine. Congratulations to you both. The finest young couple in Wales."

Gareth could not speak. Once the thought flashed through his brain, "But I did not ask her." The next moment rushed the other thought, "Fate has enslaved you. You cannot marry Mervee, therefore what does it matter whom you marry? Any woman will do!" and then came the third thought, those insidious words of Vaughan's about founding a family. Why not go through with it? Why not let them do just as they liked?

Gwyn Vaughan unlocked a cupboard. He took out a decanter, touched a bell and asked his head clerk to bring in some glasses.

"This is port, very old port," he remarked in his jocular way. "It was originally laid in the cellars at Pant y Cariad and given to me by Sir Ivor Prichard," he went on, with a meaning glance in the direction of Gareth. "I only offer it to my very wealthiest clients. This is a most auspicious occasion!"

The head clerk entered and placed the glasses on the desk.

"Bring a fourth, Jones," cried Vaughan. "You have been in the firm's service since boyhood. Come, come, drink to the health of the future mistress of Maes y Groes estate; my niece here has just told me the news. The squire and my niece are to be married soon. Eh! that's right, is it not?"

"Well, yes, quite right," Gareth answered dully.

"To the future bride and bridegroom," cried Vaughan excitedly.

He could do no more business that day. The news spread like wildfire through the office.

"Not a very enthusiastic lover," thought Gwyn uneasily; "however, Ceinwyn will see to it that he doesn't slip off. I can trust her there, for certain sure. I'll get the terms of the marriage settlement drawn up quickly. I'll see to it that he settles a good sum on Ceinwyn; never know what highfalutin' notion may get into his head. Hope the Archdruid won't come along making a fuss. At any rate I'll broadcast the news as quickly as I can."

Gwyn Vaughan's bosom friend was the editor of the local paper, and he took the first opportunity of making his way down to his office.

"I should like to get a neat little announcement into what is known as the Society column of some of the papers," said he. "My niece is going to be married to the squire."

The editor looked up sharply.

"Well, indeed, Vaughan, I was only thinking this morning that the romance of the Maes y Groes estate is a real newspaper story, and this adds to the piquancy of the romance. Congratulations. I hear this young Elys is something of a millionaire."

"That's right. The mineral wealth of the valley has marvellous possibilities."

"You know, of course, the inner history of the business. As man to man now, not for publication, what is at the back of this story? What relation was this boy Elys to the man who left him all his wealth?"

"There, indeed, my lips are sealed," said Vaughan.

"Pity, however. It is the best newspaper story I have heard of for many a long day."

Thus it came to pass a day or so later Gareth read the lines which Sir Islwyn had read out to his daughter. And he knew that he was no longer master of his actions. . . . He was a prisoner at Maes y Groes, a prisoner in the house of Vaughan at Hengwrt. It was Vaughan who made

all arrangements, Vaughan who suggested the Pant y Cariad gold cup. Gareth wrote briefly to Llio:

"I'm going to marry Ceinwyn. I thought seriously over what you said about this estate, but it claims me. I wish you would come here and see its beauty. I wish you would try to realise many things that are difficult to explain. Ceinwyn wants me to bring her to Llanina, but I do not feel inclined to do so——"

Whilst he was writing, Ceinwyn came into the room.

"What are you doing?" she asked suspiciously. "You are not giving up Maes y Groes? Oh, Gareth, you frighten me!" She looked over his shoulder. Instinctively Gareth slipped the letter in the envelope; a sense of guiltiness oppressed him.

Oh, he did not want her to read those words which he had written to his uncle: "Ceinwyn wants me to bring her to Llanina, but I do not feel inclined to do so."

"It's absurd to say that I frighten you," he cried harshly. "We still have youth even if I chucked the whole thing. A woman takes a man for richer or poorer when she marries him. You are not telling me that you are only marrying me for what I have, are you?" He took her hands roughly in his own. "Come along, let me have the truth. Are you marrying me for my money?"

"Of course not."

"Then what does it matter to you if I give up Maes y Groes?"

"It was silly of me."

"Then whether I am rich, or whether I am poor, you wish to marry me?"

Ceinwyn hesitated a moment before replying, trying to choose her words, studying the face of the relentless man before her, and a chill passed over her. Instinctively she knew that she must play her cards very carefully until after the marriage ceremony.

"Why don't you speak?"

"Oh, why do you frighten me?" Ceinwyn exclaimed

again. "What does it matter to me if you have money or no money?"

"If I had come as a poor boy searching for work on this property, should I have found you as kind and sympathetic?"

"I have a sympathetic nature," Ceinwyn declared. "But why discuss these things? You ought to know that I could not marry a man whom I did not love."

"Of course not."

"That's all right." Ceinwyn sighed with relief. "Let us go for a canter. I did not ride all the time you were away."

"A couple of days at the most," echoed Gareth, trying to smile naturally.

"Well, when you are fond of a person," Ceinwyn exclaimed, "you do not reckon time by hours or days."

For a moment Gareth was silent, and then in a low voice he muttered: "I agree; time cannot be measured when one loves."

She glanced at him sharply, and with a jealous pang she saw that his face wore an expression which had never rested there for her.

"You don't love anyone else better than me?"

The next moment she realised that she had made a mistake, for he turned upon her furiously and said:

"Have I ever said I loved you?"

"Oh, I don't know what you mean," cried Ceinwyn. "But long ago you confessed something about a girl."

"There is no girl," Gareth retorted, and his heart echoed the cry, "there is no girl—there is no girl, for Mervee has passed away from me for ever!"

"Splendid," sighed Ceinwyn. She slipped her hand through his arm, in the intimate way in which a woman treats the man whom she regards as her lover. "I want you to believe me when I say that even if you had not a farthing in the world I should love you just as much as I love you now."

"Then I'm a happy man," Gareth muttered, but

his troubled expression belied his words, and he added:

"You'll have to be patient with me, I'm a rough sort of chap. I was at sea in my youth, I have no drawing-room manners——"

A short time afterwards they were riding together through the valley. Gareth was very silent. Ceinwyn knew exactly which road they would take. He was never tired of leading his horse to Pant y Cariad, the stone dwelling in which he was born, the stone dwelling in which his mother had enjoyed the sweets of love.

CHAPTER XXX

THE PRISONER

Gwyn Vaughan heard no more from Gareth about throwing away his birthright. It is true that he was discreet. He did not ask his future nephew to sign superfluous documents; he spared him in every possible way. Gareth wrote again to his uncle informing him that he was to be married within two months.

The letter worried Llio, and although he was very busy making arrangements for the forthcoming Eisteddfod he decided:

"I'll pay him a surprise visit. Any way, I can see what this girl is like." He called Lisi and asked for his best coat and hat, and carrying a small bag in his hand he made for the station. On his way he met Moses Hews, the postman.

"I was just coming up to your place," said he, and he handed Llio a letter which was addressed in a woman's handwriting to "the Archdruid of Wales." The envelope was large and mauve-tinted. He slipped it into his

pocket, and within a few hours he found himself at Maes y Groes. He did not intend to trespass upon the hospitality of the Vaughans. On arrival he went straight to the Castle Hotel, which was much frequented by tourists motoring through the principality. Having made arrangements for the night, he went his way up the hill to Hengwrt. When he reached the house the servant told him that "Mister Elys and Miss Ceinwyn were out riding." She asked Llio to come in and wait.

"No, no, I don't think I will do that," he answered thoughtfully, "I'll go back to the hotel. Perhaps you will tell my nephew that I shall be glad if he will come down to see me on his return."

He was just going through the gate when he came face to face with Vaughan, and the latter recognised the Archdruid at once from many photographs that he had seen of this famous man. He was effusive in his greeting, although he still feared Llio's influence over his nephew.

"Well, this is champion," he cried. "Are we not a lucky couple of men to have such a fine nephew and niece between us? There is no man in the world to whom I would have given my little Ceinwyn with greater pleasure than to Gareth. But wherever are you going? Where is your luggage? The lovers are out, but I am having an early bite of lunch. I have got a big case on in the County Court."

"I'm staying the night at the Castle," said Llio. "I want to see Gareth."

"All that you can see for miles and miles belongs to him."

"I'm not interested in his possessions," Llio replied impatiently. "If I had my way he would not touch a penny of Sir Ivor Prichard's money."

"So he has confided the name of his father to you," Vaughan exclaimed with a frown.

"Yes, he told me," Llio answered quietly. "I am greatly opposed to his taking this property. I should

like you to know my feelings on the matter. But whatever I may think of the ethics of the case, I have no right to allow a breach to come between us."

"Glad you take a reasonable view," Vaughan replied, in tones of relief. "Money can do a lot of good in the world. I am sure your nephew is a most generous man."

"Yes, if he has his own way he will be generous all right," said Llio.

Whilst they were talking there was the sound of horses' hoofs upon the drive, and the next moment Gareth and Ceinwyn came in view.

"What a surprise!" Gareth sprang from his horse, and he took his uncle's hands warmly within his own. With a pang Llio noticed the dark rings around his nephew's eyes, as if his nights were sleepless. "This is Ceinwyn," said he. Llio went up to the girl on horseback, and with his clear, direct gaze he sought to read the secrets of her soul, and to himself he thought: "Pretty enough, but scheming. How would she treat the boy if he were penniless?"

Neither Ceinwyn nor her uncle would hear of his returning to the hotel. Ceinwyn slipped down from her horse, and she walked into the house side by side with the Archdruid, whilst Gareth took the horses away to the stables. She was dressed in much the same fashion as Mervee. She tried to make a good impression on Llio. She told him in her ingratiating way that for "ages and ages" she had simply longed to meet him. Begging to be excused whilst he took his "bite of lunch," Vaughan hurried away to the dining-room. Whilst Ceinwyn went to change, Llio paced the drawing-room. He could not withhold his admiration for the beauty of the vale, and as he looked upon the peaceful scene he was a prey to a hundred and one emotions. Could he be angry with Gareth because he would not give up these pleasant lands? And yet Morvydd had preferred the sea. . . . A mist momentarily dimmed his vision. He thrust his hand into his pocket for his handkerchief,

and when he withdrew it he found he had also brought forth the mauve-tinted envelope that he had placed therein. He opened the letter.

"DEAR MR. ELYS,—Please forgive me writing to you in this impulsive fashion, but there is a subject very near to my heart. My only inheritance from my parents was a beautiful voice. It required care and tuition. It was trained for opera, for experts believed that the Welsh should excel in this art. The result, I may be pardoned for saying so, lies in the success which I have achieved. Kings and queens have showered honours upon me, governments too. These things would not have been mine had not fate sent a rich man into my life. Now why do I write thus to you? You are Archdruid of Wales. Why not endeavour to form a fund for helping such cases as mine? I will willingly give my services. I read in a paper of the romance that had come into the life of your nephew, the new squire of Maes y Groes. It would be a splendid thing if he would also give financial support to my scheme. Will you ask him if I could see him and talk things over with him? I am coming to Llanina Priory. Will he meet me there? With many apologies for the length of this letter,

"Yours sincerely,

"CORRIS."

"Dear me, dear me," thought Elys, "the famous Corris." . . . A few moments later Gareth joined him.

"Thank God you're not going to allow anything to come between you and me," he exclaimed. "Why, what's that?"

"As you are such a rich man you might like to help Corris with her pet scheme."

"Didn't know you knew her," Gareth exclaimed.

" Never seen her," Llio admitted, " but she has written to me. Here, read for yourself. She wants to meet you."

Gareth read the letter.

" I like her enthusiasm. I'd like to help her, and Ceinwyn wants to meet her. Rather a joke my being asked to Llanina Priory. I should like to go out of sheer curiosity," he said quietly. " I should like to find out Sir Islwyn's attitude to me. How I wish I had the power to turn him out of the Priory."

" And Mervee ? "

" She doesn't care where she lives," Gareth retorted wildly. " She only wants me. God ! She only wants me as I want her," and without a moment's warning he sank down into a chair and his body was wracked by silent sobs.

" Boy bach," Llio remonstrated, " you cannot go on like this. You'll make yourself ill. No man could stand this awful strain. Why not go away for a bit ? Come to Carreg Ina. Mervee won't come near us if she knows that you are there. Lisi shall look after you. Come to the old place until your marriage."

Ceinwyn heard Llio's advice to his nephew when she came quietly into the room. She flushed with anger at Llio's remark. Her uncle had said to her before he hurried away to court :

" The old man is something of a fanatic. Even if he does leave Gareth alone about Maes y Groes now, he will be trying to get money out of him for all manner of things. I have heard it said that Llio Elys has little thought of money. When he makes something extra by his lectures and special sermons, he usually sends it away to some charity. Already I have destroyed many begging letters that have come to Gareth. Don't leave them alone together. If he does not persuade Gareth to renounce the estate, he may influence him to give the larger portion of his wealth away. I know the type."

She had hurried to the drawing-room just in time to

hear Llio's suggestion. Both men turned and stared at her in surprise when she cried out :

" Oh, I shall hate you if you try to take Gareth away from me. He cannot go. We have so much to do, is it not so ? We will come for a visit after the wedding, and then there is the horse-jumping. My uncle is looking forward to introducing me to all the county as the future wife of the Squire of Maes y Groes."

Gareth sighed.

" You see, uncle," he smiled wearily, " it's all a little difficult," and trying to put Ceinwyn in a good humour, he handed Corris's letter to her.

" Oh, Corris, I want to meet her," Ceinwyn cried, but as she went on reading the letter a hardness crept into her face. Her uncle's words came to her memory, " He may influence him to give the larger portion of his wealth away. I know the type."

" Dear me, she is not backward in asking," she exclaimed, a little off her guard. " Well, indeed, these people have cheek, asking for money almost before one has grown accustomed to it. My uncle says he has destroyed no end of begging letters—begging letters to Gareth—isn't it shameful ? "

" But surely Gareth sees all his own letters ? " Llio remarked quietly.

" Well, yes, of course," Ceinwyn retorted crossly. " I am only talking of the begging letters."

" I must speak to your uncle," said Gareth, with annoyance. " The begging letters are the ones that I should like to see."

" But if you took any notice of them you would be robbed," Ceinwyn declared. " You think that everybody's good like your uncle here, but I know differently. If it once got out that you t ok any notice of begging, Maes y Groes would be packed with people trying to fleece you."

" Have you never heard the saying about casting bread upon the waters ? "

Ceinwyn tossed her head angrily.

" It shall be returned to thee after many days," Llio declared.

" Indeed, I don't think I should like to live in the house of a preacher," cried Ceinwyn, and she suddenly burst into tears.

" My dear, indeed I did not mean to upset you," said Llio. " I came here full of kindly thoughts towards you both." He was greatly distressed.

Gareth, pale as death, looked silently upon Ceinwyn's hysterical outburst. He knew that he ought to throw his arms around her and comfort her. Even if her attitude had been unreasonable, at least this is what love would have done. This is what would have happened if it had been Mervee who was at fault.

" You must take no notice of a stupid old man like myself," Llio said.

" I know you don't like me," Ceinwyn cried passionately. " Directly I saw you I knew that you had only come here to try and take him away."

" You mustn't talk to my uncle in this fashion," Gareth interposed. " It is unfair." Fortunately at that awkward moment the maid came in and announced that dinner was on the table. The tense situation was relieved, albeit the wound was not healed.

Llio struggled to fall into an easy way of conversation. He began to talk of trains back to Llanina. He felt Ceinwyn's bitter antagonism ; it was unbearable. He wanted to put Maes y Groes behind him.

" But you are not going home again to-day ! Why it's too much for you, uncle," Gareth remonstrated.

" Of course you won't go," Ceinwyn cried, making a desperate effort to feign some sort of cordiality.

" My boy, I must get back," Llio declared, and he spoke the truth, for this strained situation was intolerable.

Ceinwyn took care not to leave nephew and uncle together again. When Gareth said, " Come over to the

window with me, and I will show you the spot where Pant y Cariad is set, the place where I was born and the place which I mean to rebuild," there was a haunted look on his face. Oh, he wanted to be alone with Llio and to say to him :

" You will not blame me because I cling to my heritage."

Llio gravely followed him across the room. Gareth explained the position of Pant y Cariad. He told him of the stream that flowed through the pleasant grounds, that there were luxuriant woods, and towering behind, the breast of a mountain.

" Yes, yes, it is wonderful," Llio agreed. " Hap if the warm blood of youth was in my veins I should think differently about all these things," and suddenly he felt very old. Even the burning evangelical flame seemed to be dying within him. The distressing thought took shape in his brain :

" Would Morvydd have written that letter to her son, had she known she was destroying the part of him that is so near to God—true love ? "

At last came the moment when Llio left Hengwrt.

" I will run upstairs and put on my hat," Ceinwyn said.

" I shall be all right," Llio declared ; " indeed, it is not at all necessary for anybody to see me to the station." Ceinwyn would not listen to him. She was afraid of being tricked, afraid of " missing something," to use her own words. She knew that she had a restive lover.

Directly Ceinwyn had gone out of the room, Llio turned appealingly to his nephew.

" Do me a great favour. Let me slip away now without any fuss."

" As you will," Gareth answered agitatedly. The two men clasped hands, and the next moment Llio was making his way down the path.

" Why did you let him go ? " Ceinwyn cried breathlessly when she came into the room again. She had raced upstairs and back again. She had a feeling that something was going to happen.

Gareth turned and stared into her flushed, excited features.

"He wished to go—alone," he answered; then he noticed something lying on the floor. It was the letter that Corris had written to his uncle. He picked it up and slipped it into his pocket. Suddenly he turned to Ceinwyn and said abruptly:

"I'm not well. I'm going away for a day or two after the horse-jumping."

"Without me? It is mean of your uncle to ask you to go to Carreg Ina without me, and our marriage so near."

"I'm not going to my uncle," said Gareth shortly.

CHAPTER XXXI

"I HATE HER!"

MERVEE awoke early on the day of the horse show. She knew that this was going to be a momentous occasion for her. A new horse always provided excitement, although she had absolute control over the mare. She donned her new riding "togs." They showed off the supple strength of her fine young body. There was a boyish grace about the manner in which she sat in her saddle that was wholly enchanting. Dilys Pennant and her brother joined the Llanina Priory party. The horses had been sent on ahead, Howel accompanying the grooms. The day previously Mervee had gone down to Carreg Ina. To her dismay she found Llio singularly silent and depressed. She missed the accustomed warmth of his greeting.

"You are not well," she exclaimed. "I don't think you ought to be alone so much. Perhaps when Gareth

is married," she went on earnestly, "you will leave us and go to Maes y Groes."

Llio suddenly looked up.

"Mervee," he said brokenly, "she is not the wife for him. It will be an unhappy married life."

And these words haunted her when she was preparing for the horse-jumping at Maes y Groes. It was a gloomy morning. There was a heaviness in the atmosphere; and as she motored along the white road a pall of mist hung upon the mountains. Sir Islwyn was disappointed; he wanted to have a good view of this "Happy Vale" which had come into the possession of the man whom he had once despised. They made for the Castle Hotel; it was crowded with a gay throng intent on having a good time at any price.

On reaching the show-grounds Mervee searched the vast throng with but one thought in her head—Gareth. She would see him with this girl who had robbed her of his love.

The grand stand was in a dominating position; it was covered with an awning. A large portion of the field was roped off, and it was in this enclosure that the various competitions were held. Tents had been erected around the field. In one tent agricultural implements were exhibited—mills for grinding corn, and all manner of labour-saving inventions for the modern farmer. On a large table in front of the stand the cup and trophies were placed, which were to be presented to the successful competitors after the show. In the centre was the Pant y Cariad gold cup. Mervee went up to view it with her father.

"Talk about the irony of fate," said he, "that beats anything that I have ever seen. Pity we cannot see ahead sometimes," he sighed regretfully.

Mervee read the inscription printed in bold black letters: "The Pant y Cariad Cup, given by the Squire of Maes y Groes, Gareth Elys, Esq. Prizes to be presented at six o'clock by Miss Ceinwyn Rees."

" There's many a slip, my dear," Sir Islwyn ejaculated.

Mervee turned a scarlet face towards him.

" Do you think I'd marry Gareth now, just because he's rich ? " she asked scornfully ; but she stopped abruptly at a warning glance from her father. Gwyn Vaughan, clad in a new tweed suit with a gay flower in his buttonhole, came up to them. This was a great day for him, the greatest day of his life. His niece's connection with the squire had placed him on equal terms with " the County," a set that did not take solicitors, no matter how promising, to its capricious bosom.

" Allow me to make myself known to you, Sir Islwyn," Gwyn Vaughan exclaimed affably. " I am the squire's agent. Perhaps you've heard he is to marry my niece, Ceinwyn. Come along, my dear, I want you to meet one of the most distinguished baronets in the county." And he chuckled in a familiar manner. " Nothing new about the baronetcy of Prichard. It's the genuine article—centuries old. I knew the late baronet very well. He met with a tragic end."

The cold displeasure faded away from Sir Islwyn's face.

" Yes, yes," he said eagerly. " I have made all sorts of enquiries about it. Terrible sands those—the sinking sands of Llanina. Oh, but your niece ! "

Ceinwyn was extravagantly dressed in a rose-coloured frock. A string of pearls, Gareth's gift, was around her white throat. A large rose-coloured hat covered her fair hair.

" Delighted to meet you," said Sir Islwyn. " This is my daughter."

The two girls stared at one another. Ceinwyn grew pale when she looked into Mervee's beautiful features. Mervee was holding her emotions in, with as tight a rein as she held a restive horse.

" How do you do ? " said Mervee, stretching out her little hand, which was covered by a serviceable riding-glove. Ceinwyn gave a quivering sigh. She looked closely at Mervee's hat, her perfectly cut coat, reaching

to her knees, the smart breeches, and highly polished brown leggings and shoes. This was the model that was in Gareth's mind when he told her what sort of things to get for her riding-kit. This was the girl who had won Gareth's heart. This was the girl from whom she must keep him. And Ceinwyn hated Mervee even with the same bitter hatred which Howel lavished upon Gareth.

"You must come into the tent. Mr. Gareth Elys is entertaining for luncheon, tea, and drinks—anything you like," said Vaughan, who, having broken the ice, slipped into a rather objectionable easy manner.

"Is Mr. Elys about? We know him, my daughter and I," said Sir Islwyn.

"Really, that's interesting. Didn't know that he went in for society or anything of that sort until he came into his property."

Sir Islwyn vouchsafed no reply to this remark.

Mervee moved away. She could not stand the cruel, cynical, almost impudent stare of the girl whom Gareth was to marry. For the first time in her life she found herself in the throes of torturing jealousy. She tried to stamp it out, to stamp out the whole bitter misery that love for Gareth meant to her. But she might as well have tried to stem the fall of the great waters which tumble down from the hills, carrying rock and lamb and bracken in their merciless sweep from the terrific heights of wild Cambria. . . .

Howel was in high spirits that day. He was in his element at agricultural meetings. He was also amazed at the stories he heard about Gareth's inheritance. He began to wonder if, instead of keeping up the old feud, it would not be better for him to try and patch up the difference that he had had with him. Sir Islwyn introduced him to Ceinwyn, and Howel was rather amused at the way she smiled at him.

"All women like me," he decided complacently; and the thought flashed through his brain: "There is one

thing, anyway, that everyone must admit. A girl influences a man for good or for bad, whether he likes it or not. I might get at Elys through her. I'll get into this girl's good books. Even if it means a flirtation."

Mervee found herself seventh on the list. She had time to make for a corner of the field in which there was a dog show. She pushed her way through the dense crowd, for a tent of this description is always a popular draw. Suddenly she felt someone touch her arm, and, looking up, she found Gareth's hungry eyes feasting themselves upon her.

He looked gaunt and haggard, much older, but he was trim and smart, and well groomed. He wore clothes of quite excellent cut, which showed off the lines of his athletic figure.

"Mervee," he cried hoarsely, "I've been looking for you everywhere. I've got something for you. Couldn't get any about here at this season of the year, so I wired up to London for it."

"I don't want it," she said passionately. "What luck indeed can you give me?" She pushed the sprig of white heather which he held in his hand away from her.

"Mervee, for God's sake wear it."

"Take it to the girl you are going to marry."

"I hate her." Gareth could have torn his tongue out directly he had said those three words. Oh, why should he show his bruises to a Prichard? And yet every hour he was learning one terrible truth. That no matter how hard one might try to stamp love from the heart, there comes a time when it is stronger than death itself.

"Oh, Gareth, you hate her, then why——"

He seized Mervee's hands.

"I don't care a damn for anyone but you. I'm going away—going to hell. But you'll wear this to-day, as you wore it once before!"

She became weak under the magic of his touch, moved

by his words; she trembled when he tucked the sprig of white heather into the ribbon of her hat.

"Mervee, come away with me, just you and I, away from everything. Let us forget you are a Prichard. Let us only remember the day when you met me on the quay. When we lived those wonderful hours in the tower—the warmth—the poetry of it."

She tore herself away from him, to find herself faced by Howel.

"Heavens, what's the matter with you?" he exclaimed. "Come along, let's go off into the tent. Our friend Gareth Elys is entertaining royally, although, by the way, he is missing. Gwyn Vaughan thought he was stricken with sudden shyness. Hello," he exclaimed, "who gave you that posh spray of white heather? I remember your father rowing you no end when Gareth Elys gave you a spray like that. I guess he wouldn't make such a fuss to-day. Miss Rees is an artful little bit of fluff. I shouldn't mind betting there are no flies on her back." He stopped, rather surprised that Mervee did not pull him up. "I say, I'm sorry, thought my rot might cheer you up a bit. Mervee, let me get you something."

"No, I'm all right." She tried to frame her lips into a smile. "I shall be better still when I'm on the mare."

A groom came along leading Nerth. The horse-cloth was removed, and Howel slipped his hand beneath Mervee's foot and gave her a lift on to the saddle. She became the cynosure of all eyes, the beauty of Llanina! Never had she looked so regally splendid as on that day. In the distance the white heather on her hat looked like a tuft of white feathers.

She rode her horse into the enclosure. The mare was restive, she did not like the crowds or the applause. At last the signal was given. First of all came the jumps over wooden fencing, then higher fences covered with branches of green trees, and the water jump. The mare

hesitated, but Mervee whispered to the horse, coaxing her into good humour.

"Come along now," she cooed, and over the top horse and young rider passed. Then something went wrong. Mervee was tearing along on the wings of the wind. . . .

Gareth could not face the grand stand. He knew all that was to happen. Had he not heard the situation discussed by Ceinwyn and her uncle until he was sick of the whole business? He was to be the prize exhibit of the show. He was to be shown off like a puppet. Ceinwyn would smile vapidly and receive congratulations that she had done well for herself in the eyes of the world, and Gwyn Vaughan—he would become more lordly than the squire himself. All these things tormented Gareth. Mervee at least should not witness his humiliation. He found himself wandering across the ground. He vaulted lightly over a stile and lit a cigarette. Beneath him there was a drop of between fifty and sixty feet, leading to the disused shaft of a copper-mine. The restful scene before him was at war with his troubled state of mind. Away in the distance he heard the cheers of the crowds. Cheers that mocked his misery. . . .

Suddenly he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs. They came nearer and nearer. At last he saw a horse ridden by a girl careering madly towards him. She was deathly white, and her arms were straining at the reins. He sprang to his feet, and he called out wildly: "Mervee, oh, my Mervee!" The horse was making straight for the stile. Already Gareth imagined the mad leap of the terrified animal, and later the crashing thud of her body. She would fall and roll down that terrible precipice with her light burden beneath her. For an instant Gareth closed his eyes; he knew that nothing could save Mervee from certain death if the horse could not be stopped before the stile was reached. With a desperate, impulsive movement he swung himself at the animal's head. For a moment there was sickening uncertainty as to the fate

of the trio. They seemed to be tied up into a knot—woman, horse, and man. Gareth was dragged mercilessly along, when with his right hand he caught the reins. There was a hasty swerve and the animal stopped dead. The next moment Mervee swayed forward, and Gareth was only just in time to catch her in his arms. The horse—exhausted, foam-flecked—was at bay. Gareth laid his burden on the grass, and he unfastened the stock from around her white throat, and chafed her hands, calling her wildly by every endearing name. Her dark lashes lay like shadows on her delicate, round cheek, but her face was still, emotionless like marble.

"Pet lamb," he cried, "oh, my Mervee!" He stooped over her and kissed her wildly on the mouth, and once again she was wooed by the warmth of his passion.

CHAPTER XXXII

REVOLT

It was an eternity to Gareth before the colour began to ebb back again into Mervee's still face. Then came the sound of another horse's hoofs galloping at a desperate pace over the dry turf. They drew nearer and nearer, until at length a grey-haired, soldierly man appeared in sight, riding a horse he had borrowed from the ground.

"Sir Islwyn!" Gareth exclaimed passionately. How he hated that man at the moment. He felt as if his troubles and Mervee's accident could all be put down to his account. Thundering at his heels came Howel on horseback. In the distance a crowd followed—a cloud of human vultures hungry to gaze upon the misery of a fellow-being.

Sir Islwyn gave a hoarse exclamation when he caught sight of the prostrate figure on the ground, and he sprang out of his saddle almost at the same moment as Howel.

"Is she hurt? Elys, you here—thank God!" Sir Islwyn's keen eyes took in the situation at a glance.

"More frightened than hurt," Gareth retorted sullenly.

Howel came to the other side of Mervee; kneeling down, he took her hand, whilst Sir Islwyn, deeply agitated, found himself at a loss for words.

Opening her eyes, Mervee tried to sit up. There was a dazed expression on her features when she saw Howel. In her unnerved state it was not possible for her to hide her gesture of revulsion when she took her hand swiftly away from his. But for Gareth, there was only the old love burning as brightly as on that first day when he had taken her in his arms, and passion had awakened. . . .

"Oh, father," she exclaimed, "it was the cheering. Nerth hated it. I should have been killed if it hadn't been for Gareth. Nerth was heading straight for the stile." With a shudder, she momentarily closed her eyes again.

Sir Islwyn's face twitched. Was not Mervee the apple of his eye? Albeit they could not always think alike, for modern youth is impetuous. It has its own ideals, just as it suffers from its own limitations as to worldly knowledge.

"I don't know how to thank you, Elys," Sir Islwyn remarked brokenly.

Gareth avoided his gaze, and he said:

"I don't want thanks." He ignored Howel; he treated him as a complete stranger whom he had not met before. Thus whatever Howel's ideas might have been about getting on the right side of Gareth now that he was a rich man, he was doomed to disappointment. Like all men who live a double life, his conceit kept him in a state

of glorious optimism. "I'm far too clever to be found out" had been his comforting conviction. So great indeed was his egotism that he believed that he could ride upon the crest of the breakers, like a stormy petrel skimming the mountainous seas of the troubled ocean.

Meanwhile Mervee had risen slowly to her feet. Sir Islwyn studied his daughter anxiously as she patted the now-docile Nerth. Crowds of people had reached them, and a motor-car in which sat Ceinwyn and her uncle.

"I hope Miss Prichard isn't hurt," Gwyn Vaughan cried out.

"Thanks to Elys, she is safe," Sir Islwyn answered.

Ceinwyn jumped out of the car. She pulled at Gareth's sleeve as if to publicly proclaim the fact that, although he might have saved the life of another girl, he was her own exclusive property.

"Wherever have you been?" she cried. "I've been searching for you everywhere. People have been asking for you. It was strange that the squire was missing on such a day."

Gareth was like a man in a trance. It is doubtful if he even heard what she was saying, for one terrible thought reverberated in his brain: "Oh, dear God, I wish that I was dead!"

Mervee moved aside to avoid witnessing a scene which she knew must cause Gareth the greatest pain. She put her foot in the stirrup so that she could vault on to the saddle.

"I don't think it wise of you to mount Nerth again to-day," Sir Islwyn remonstrated.

"I'm all right now, father," she retorted. "Besides, it is best for me to get my nerve back at once. Nerth must not think she can master me." Turning to Gareth, she looked him straight in the face. She had a bewitchingly tender expression; and even in his despair Gareth saw that her lips were like crimson rose-leaves.

"Thank you," she said simply; and to Gareth her voice was like some rare music. Instinctively he found himself comparing her with Ceinwyn—Ceinwyn who had become sinister, a menace to his peace of mind. Mervee was on her horse again, Howel mounted, and then Sir Islwyn. The trio were soon riding away towards the show-ground once more.

"Get into the car," said Ceinwyn coldly.

Gareth did not move, and, giving way to uncontrolled anger, she shook him violently by the arm.

"Come along, come along," cried Vaughan, "the people will be waiting for the prizes. You have been away too long from the field already, Elys. You must do the lord-of-the-manor stunt, you know. That is one of the debts that one pays for greatness. One is seldom one's own master."

For a moment Gareth hesitated; the old rebellious feeling swept over him against conventionality, hap it was a heritage from his headstrong father. Why should he go? Why should he do the thing that was distasteful to him? Why should he not be allowed to sit on the stile that for a moment had become as sweet as heaven and as bitter as hell?

"Come, come," Vaughan cried.

Mechanically Gareth took his seat in the car; and in a voice shaking with fury Ceinwyn said:

"So that is the girl you loved!"

Gareth did not answer her. He relapsed into silence. He found himself on the grand stand. He watched Ceinwyn give the prizes away. He heard the cheers. The Pant y Cariad Gold Cup was placed into the hands of a stranger. Then came the end. . . .

Ceinwyn was determined that she would thrash things out with Gareth that evening. He must learn to treat her with more thoughtfulness, with more consideration.

Even Vaughan was a little perturbed at the way in which things were going. The show had not been the

success he had thought it would be. He expected Gareth to be more pushing, "more lordly" in his manner, instead of which he purposely kept in the background.

"Why not hurry the marriage?" Vaughan suggested to his niece.

"He is stubborn at times, like a mule," Ceinwyn retorted bitterly.

"Tut-tut! A woman can always get round a man if she plays her cards properly," Vaughan declared impatiently. "Don't be too sharp with him. Go gently until you are wearing the wedding-ring. Flatter him well."

But on reaching Hengwrt Gareth became even more stubborn. Ceinwyn tried to put her arms around him, to woo him in the only way she knew—to exert her physical charms upon him, to appeal to the weak streak in human nature. But he was cold and unyielding, utterly disinclined to return the warmth of her caress.

"Sorry if I was cross, boy bach," she whispered, pressing her fingers into his coat-sleeve. "But a woman is always a fool when she is in love. Jealousy isn't a sin, you know."

He asked coldly: "Surely you are not still pretending that you are in love with me?"

"You are angry because I noticed the way you looked at Sir Islwyn's daughter," said Ceinwyn unwisely. "I read your secret at once. You have treated me shamefully."

"Oh, I'm tired of this," cried Gareth. "I must go away for a time. I told you so before. I'll catch the mail train to-night. I'll write to you. I cannot stand this bondage another day."

For a moment every scrap of colour was drained away from Ceinwyn's face.

"You are not going away before our marriage? Let us be married earlier than we decided upon; then you'll find we'll hit it off better. Six weeks to-day is our

wedding. Make it next week. I am willing," her voice had become distressed and pleading.

"Six weeks to-day," Gareth said mechanically. "I won't fail you. But until that day I must have freedom."

CHAPTER XXXIII

FACE TO FACE

No amount of persuasion either on the part of Vaughan or Ceinwyn caused Gareth to alter his decision. He packed his bag and caught the midnight train to London. He arrived at Euston early the following morning, and put up, as a temporary measure, at the hotel there. During the day he went to a firm of tailors and ordered some clothes. He would "see life" before he settled down. For a week he would have—a hell of a time! He wrote to Llio and told him that he had taken his advice, and that he had decided to have a change! "I'm to be married in six weeks' time, and I shall not be in Maes y Groes before that date. When I am tired of London I shall come to Carreg Ina—anyway, I shall be at the Eisteddfod. Directly I can get a decent suit I shall go and see Corris. I intend to back her scheme. Did you hear about Mervee's runaway horse . . . ?"

But London did not amuse him. The women who offered their sex and caresses, like a butcher his joints, for hard cash, repulsed him utterly. The night clubs bored him; there were the same vapid bits of flesh, better dressed perhaps than in Piccadilly—but just as foolish. . . . He hated the whole sorry scheme of things.

One day he presented himself at the fashionable hotel the name of which headed the pale mauve note-paper that Corris favoured when she wrote to the Archdruid. Gareth sent up his card, and a few minutes later he was

informed that Madame was " out of town " and would not arrive until about six o'clock that evening. He was disappointed ; he turned despondently away. He glanced around the lounge, with its comfortable chairs and flowering plants. At any rate, there was some sort of refinement about the place.

He booked a room, and before dinner his luggage had been transferred from the hotel near Euston. He tried to get a seat for the opera. Corris was singing *La Bohème* that night. But he was told that there was nothing in the house, only a box almost on the stage.

" That's all right," Gareth said carelessly, " I'll take it."

He dined in the hotel. The scene fascinated him ; there was a seductive, languorous air which was soothing to his highly strung nerves. The rose-shaded lights created a becoming glow. The music was not too loud—sensuous, appealing. . . . It created the old mad longing for Mervee—Mervee, his sun, his moon, his star. He sighed impatiently, and the old hatred against the Prichards swept over him, but the harshness died swiftly away from his features. Once again he saw Mervee lying inert upon the short grass. Her gold-mounted riding-whip clasped in her little nerveless hand, a bunch of white heather making a white patch upon her beige-coloured felt hat, her eyelashes forming a silk shadow against her snow-white skin.

" God, it's intolerable," he groaned. Wherever he went, whatever he did, he could not blot out the memory of that girl from his heart. He made enquiries about Corris. " Anyway," he reflected, " she must have a genuine love of Wales, otherwise she would not have written that letter to my uncle." He was told that she had her own suite of rooms, as completely shut off from the multitude as if it was her own self-contained flat. Her meals were served to her there.

More lonely than ever, in due course he found himself in his box at the opera. The animated scene stirred

up some interest in him—the well-dressed women, their jewels, their sleek, shingled heads, and the well-groomed men. The lights were lowered, the music wailed through the building, and the curtain went up. The story of *La Bohème* unfolded itself. Gareth, leaning well forward, was amazed at the youthful lines of Corris's body. The faultless, birdlike notes, pregnant with sympathy and charm, fell from her lips without effort. Suddenly, during one of the most dramatic arias, her glance fell upon Gareth. She stopped singing—she stumbled forward. A hush fell upon the crowded house, and, with a supreme effort, she recovered herself. She sang on, deliberately keeping her eyes away from the box in which Gareth sat. Shortly after the curtain was lowered an attendant brought a note to him. He opened it and read :

" Please come to my dressing-room at the end of the show.—CORRIS."

For the rest of the evening Gareth was filled with strange expectancy. Corris could not know who he was, and yet for some reason or other she wished to meet him. She sang with verve and passion, the general impression being that, after what was apparently a sudden attack of faintness, she had exerted all her witchery and art to prove that no physical power could touch the glory of her personality or the alluring charm of her liquid voice. . . . The curtain fell upon an entranced house. Gareth had fallen as completely under the great artist's spell as anyone in the packed building. Somebody touched him lightly on the arm ; turning, Gareth saw a slight, fair-haired man, who introduced himself as Corris's secretary. He was curious about Gareth. This was the first occasion on which anyone had been invited to the singer's dressing-room. As a rule she was adamant in her decision about seeing representatives of the Press or even her own personal friends.

" These people bring the wrong atmosphere," she

declared. "They destroy illusions about myself. In my dressing-room there is no place for the inner woman; it is only just big enough for the artist. . . ."

When Gareth entered he found himself in a garden of flowers. A gilt empire screen was drawn across one end of the room. Corris's dresser, a dark-eyed Frenchwoman, came from behind the screen and told him that Madame would be with him immediately. Would Monsieur kindly be seated?

Gareth studied the dressing-table, with its innumerable gold-topped jars which held powder and grease paints, of so many shades and colours that it reminded him of an artist's palette. On a low shelf there were various mascots, cheap "thumbs up" dolls, a small sphinx, a crucifix, a cat, and several black ebony and ivory elephants from unknown admirers, and the singer, with her highly strung Celtic temperament, was too superstitious to get rid of them.

Someone came from behind the curtain. Gareth gazed upon Corris with intense curiosity. Her dress was golden; a rope of immense pearls encircled her ivory throat, two enormous pearls were in her small, shell-like ears, and large diamonds set in platinum glittered on her fingers. Her nails were tinted a deep rose shade. Her dark hair was uncovered; her eyes were like purple pansies—compelling, mesmeric. Her skin was white and flawless, and her lips—he knew in some vague way that the deep crimson colouring was not natural, and yet they made him think of Mervee, the forbidden fruit of Llanina. . . .

"You must have thought it very odd for a stranger to send for you in this fashion," she smiled. "I assure you it is not my usual custom."

"I feel tremendously flattered," said Gareth. At the sound of his voice she swayed slightly forward as she had done on the stage. She sank down on to one of the great black satin lounge chairs, never taking her eyes from his face for a single instant.

"Can I do anything for you?" Gareth was just going to explain that he had already tried to see her earlier in the day, that he was the Archdruid's nephew, when she exclaimed:

"I have developed heart trouble. My doctors tell me I have been overdoing it lately. The season is just over," she added, with her enchanting smile. "I am going to have a beautiful rest. When I saw you in that box to-night my youth came back to me. I thought the dead had come to life."

Gareth became very still—suddenly secretive. He began to wonder what he should do when the inevitable moment came when he must give her his name.

"If you had lost someone whom you adored," Corris went on, "you would feel just like I felt when I saw you gazing at me just as he used to do. There are two things in this life which mean hell to a man or woman. One is unrequited love, the other remorse."

"Well, indeed," Gareth answered, "I am sure that you have never suffered from these ills."

"Ah, but I have," she sighed. "Would you think it terribly strange of me if I asked you to become a friend of mine? That, at least, is what a woman in my position can do. We are what is called unconventional. I am lonely; everything bores me. To-night when I saw you first the thought flashed through my mind: I am going to die, and there is Ivor—he has come to me. That is the reason why I nearly fainted. The next moment I realised how stupid I was. It was not a phantom that I saw, but life—warm flesh and blood—splendid youth—just what he was when first I saw him."

Gareth felt like a block of ice. His emotions were benumbed. He began to wonder if this was not an absurd dream. He had been thinking of Corris, writing about her to his uncle. Of course, it was absurd, this mad notion of hers. . . .

"I have astonished you by talking in this fashion, haven't I?" she asked. "I have promised to go on to a reception at Lord Gwynfyd's. Some people from the Russian Ballet are performing there to-night. Dare I ask you to come? Dare I call you Ivor—just for fun?"

"Ivor?"

Obsessed with the desire to renew her lost youth, and proud as is middle age of its past conquests, Corris held out her arm. Above the elbow she wore a slim platinum bangle studded with diamonds. In the centre was an oval plaque in platinum and bearing the initial "C" in diamonds and pearls. She touched a spring, and the next moment Gareth found himself gazing on the features of his father!

"Look in the glass, and you will see that I had not overrated the likeness between you two."

"I must tell you something," interrupted Gareth. "You have told me so much about yourself, and I——"

"Don't destroy the illusion," Corris begged him. "Perhaps it will be better for you not to come to Lord Gwynfyd's with me to-night. Perhaps I shall not go there myself. But will you call and see me to-morrow—Ivor?" She swayed forward again; but this time she did not recover, and Corris's maid came rushing from behind the screen.

"I am not surprised, Monsieur," she declared. "She has been ill all day. We had to give it out this morning that Madame was away in the country, and three doctors were summoned to the hotel. It is her heart which causes this trouble. We must humour her. She thinks you are like her old lover—and so you are."

Gareth helped Corris back to the hotel. The next day the announcements on the hoardings proclaimed the serious illness of the prima donna.

He could not tear himself away from the hotel during

her critical illness. That platinum, diamond-studded bracelet was the magnet which kept him there. There was so much he wanted to know, so much that he longed to hear. Gareth had confided to her maid that he was staying in the hotel. He gave her the number of his rooms. "Come for me any time, night or day, if I can do anything," he impressed upon her.

One day the maid took Gareth at his word.

When Gareth was shown into Corris's luxurious suite of rooms she was lying on a low sofa propped up by a bank of multi-coloured cushions. She was fragile, her dark eyes were less brilliant, but her smile had not lost its alluring charm.

"I want to thank you for being so good to me during my illness," she said. "My maid tells me that you sent flowers every day—that you were constant in your enquiries."

"It was a pleasure," Gareth protested. It never occurred to him for a moment that his determination to know the story of Corris's friendship with his father might be wrongly misconstrued. That his interest in Corris might be put down to his own infatuation for a fascinating woman. . . . And from that day she took possession of him. She was content to gaze at him and smile in her dazzling way. But in her semi-delirious state she frequently imagined him to be Ivor. . . .

Letters began to arrive from Ceinwyn. Letters telling Gareth of the preparation for their wedding; and then certain gossip found its way to Maes y Groes. Ceinwyn had formed a curious friendship with Howel. He had more than once been over to Maes y Groes on business about horses, paving the way to get some sort of advantage out of Gareth; moreover, he was having a bad time with Mervee. Since her accident she had become apathetic and listless. She showed a disinclination to ride, and, to the amazement of everybody, she asked her father to sell Nerth. This fine hunter was

sold at a good price, in spite of the fact that it was known to possess an uncertain temper. . . .

"When is Mr. Elys coming back?" Howel asked, trying to find out exactly how the land lay between them.

"I don't know," Ceinwyn answered cautiously.

"I heard from my aunt that he has formed a tremendous friendship with Corris."

"Corris?" Ceinwyn frowned. "She wanted to get money out of him for a fund of some sort."

Howel laughed sardonically.

"Crowds of people will want to raise funds when they hear of your prospective husband's wealth."

"Is Corris very fascinating to men?"

"You'll have an opportunity of judging that for yourself," he answered enigmatically. "She is coming to stay at the Priory directly she is well enough to leave London. She has ripping rooms at Delardges."

"Delardges?"

"Yes—best hotel in town."

Ceinwyn's face darkened. It was the hotel where Gareth was staying! That evening, after her uncle had finished his supper, she broke the ice.

"Gareth's behaving badly. A woman will do anything for money in these days. Corris has got hold of him. I shall go to her. I shall tell her——"

Vaughan fingered his chin, as was his habit when he was worried. As a matter of fact, although he had not mentioned the fact to Ceinwyn, he was not at all satisfied at the tone of Gareth's letters. Apart from that, it had come to his knowledge that he was spending large sums of money on someone in London. . . .

"Well, well," said he after a long pause. "I might make an excuse and say that there is a business deal that I must talk over with him. Shall we pay him a surprise visit, girl fach? Make yourself look very fashionable. I hope I am acting for the best by taking you to London, for it is not always wise to tighten your rope before you've got a proper grip."

" You know as well as I do that he'd get out of this engagement if he could," Ceinwyn cried passionately; " but I won't let him, whatever happens."

" Keep your temper well under control," Vaughan warned her. " Don't let Gareth think that you are going up to London to spy upon him. Any man would resent that. Be natural, get him to go shopping with you, try and win him, Ceinwyn. Win him by gentleness, by the wiles of a woman—you know what I mean."

" You talk as if I hadn't won him," Ceinwyn retorted ill-naturedly. " But he is like all men, faithless. . . ."

That morning Howel was in the stables when Mervee came along with her father. Whatever differences had taken place between them in the past, the breach was healed now.

" I want to get Elys over here," he confided to Mervee one morning. " I shall never forget that I owe your life to him. And I am not talking like this," Sir Islwyn went on, " because he's rich. If he were poor I should say just the same."

" It's too late," Mervee had cried passionately. Ever since the day of the show she had felt Gareth's impassioned kiss upon her face, and she knew that, no matter how great a wreck he was making of his life, he still loved her. . . .

" I have been over to Maes y Groes," Howel told Sir Islwyn one day. " Mr. Vaughan is anxious to buy a horse for his niece to ride, and he wants one from our stables. He tells me that his future son-in-law "—and Howel grinned—" has instructed him to buy anything he fancies."

Sir Islwyn glanced furtively at his daughter, but Mervee held her head high, and she did not betray any interest in the subject under discussion.

" It would be the shortest cut for Mr. Vaughan to bring his niece over here," said Sir Islwyn, " and then

they could see for themselves exactly what we have got in the way of horse-flesh."

Howel lit a cigarette, and he smilingly answered:

"But the trouble is this, sir. They know nothing whatever about the points of a horse, so they have left everything more or less in my hands. Now, if we had not already sold Nerth——"

"I am sure Gareth would not have bought Nerth for his future wife," Mervee cried sharply.

"Oh, I don't know," said Howel. "Nerth is a fine animal."

"Well, anyway, shall I send a line to Elys?" asked Sir Islwyn.

"Not much good now," said Howel. A cruel, vindictive light showed itself in his eyes when he riveted his gaze upon Mervee. "I expect he will be back again very shortly, especially as Corris is coming to the Priory. Her infatuation for the wealthy squire of Maes y Groes is one of the scandals of the London season. During her illness, I am told, she would hardly permit him out of her sight. What the end of it will be, heaven only knows."

"But it's absurd. Gareth is young enough to be her son," said Mervee.

"Not the first time that a middle-aged woman has been infatuated with a man half her age," Howel declared. . . . There were times when Howel began to feel a little apprehensive, because, for certain monetary considerations, he had paved the way for Corris to visit the Priory. He had struggled to keep his head above water, to keep his creditors at bay, but he had been plunging heavily to right himself and he had lost again. Moreover, his confederates, with whom he had got into touch during the days when he was in a Government office in London, were demanding his frequent assistance, threatening him with exposure if he did not fall in with their plans. His nerves were not as strong as they used to be. Mervee's warning about the tower had been a shock to him. The

tower was a point of vantage from whence one could watch the coast without being seen. Howel hated that tower. He had hated it when it sheltered the love-making of Gareth and Mervee, and now it had become a menace to his own safety. Any day that small boat might cut through the still waters of Llanina Bay. He must see that the forbidden cargo reached London in safety! He knew his danger, and yet always in his mind was this thought: "I'll only do it once more—and then never again." But the haunting dread was never entirely out of mind that even the cleverest of men have taken the pitcher to the well once too often! If only the tower could be burnt to the ground, if only it could be swept away—destroyed so that not one stone rested on the other to mark the spot where once it had been a lordly landmark.

In the war he had learnt something of the use of land explosives. For nights he haunted the tower. He formed a desperate plan; if danger faced him, he decided that he would not hesitate to put it into action.

CHAPTER XXXIV

REVELATION

A WOMAN of Corris's temperament lives on the fruit of past triumphs, and on the excitement of the present. The conquest of men was the breath of her existence. It kept her alive. Illness taught her that she was still a powerful queen in the world of song. Royalty paid her tribute by calling personally to enquire after her. Bouquets of exotic flowers, golden baskets of fruit, came up to her room. She was glad that Gareth could see for himself how great a personage she was.

When she became stronger, he tried to persuade her to talk of her past, but strangely enough, just as she had been anxious to discuss it with Howel, with Gareth she was reticent. She was no longer anxious to "right a wrong." She was eager now to enthral this man who reminded her so tremendously of the headstrong lover of her youth.

She still insisted on calling him Ivor; and if he protested she only laughed, and said in a sweet Welsh way:

"Tut, tut, boy bach, have I not had my own way all my life? Do you think I am going to give it up now?"

One afternoon he was having tea with her in the artistic room that faced the Thames when her man came in and said:

"They have just rung up from the bureau, sir. There is a gentleman and lady. It is the lady to whom you are engaged to be married, sir—Miss Ceinwyn Rees."

Gareth flushed, there was tense silence for a moment, and then Corris said:

"Ask them to come up."

"I'll go down."

"But why?" Corris was a trifle breathless and very pale. "Your friends are my friends," she smiled, "just as my friends are yours." When the servant had withdrawn, she added: "Perhaps it is my fault, Ivor, that I never allowed you to tell me about your life, but I wish now that I had done so. I had no idea that you were not free."

He saw that she was very angry, and, although he had no love for her, he realised there was a bond which seemed to draw Corris to him. Perhaps, if Mervee had not held him, he would have succumbed, as many had done, to her sensuous charm. . . .

"I thought we had pledged ourselves to a great friendship!"

"It is true," said Gareth earnestly; "and nothing on earth shall break it."

He walked across to the window and looked out. So

Vaughan and his niece had followed him to London. But could he blame them? Had he not treated them shamefully? A few moments later they were announced, and he hurried forth and met them. Vaughan was very smart in a well-cut morning coat. Ceinwyn was clad in scarlet rep, with a becoming hat of the same shade upon her fair hair. She thought that Corris looked like a purple orchid in her wonderful French gown. She smiled at Ceinwyn, and held out the tips of her jewelled fingers.

"All Ivor's friends are welcome here."

"Ivor?" Ceinwyn frowned.

"That's my pet name for him," laughed Corris in her tantalising manner.

Gareth kissed Ceinwyn perfunctorily upon the cheek, and Corris ordered cocktails. And she sought to engage Mr. Vaughan in conversation, so that the other two could settle their own affairs.

"The time is getting short, you see," Vaughan explained. "Mr. Elys is to be married to my niece within three weeks. There is much to do."

"I did not know the wedding was so near," said Corris. And she thought unhappily "What is the use of trying to wed the present with a delirious, phantom past?" She kept up a running flow of conversation; and Gareth, knowing the doctor's warning that excitement was dangerous to her, became anxious. He made excuses, and they took their leave from her.

"I heard about the way she was running after you," Ceinwyn said disjointedly, as she walked by Gareth's side down the wide staircase.

"Then you heard a lie."

"There are things we must settle," Vaughan interposed. "Marriage settlements and that sort of thing. I thought a few days in London would do us good. You must be patient with Ceinwyn," he went on. "It is only natural that she has missed you."

Gareth held himself in check, although he longed to

cry out: "Oh, why do you make my life unbearable to me? Why don't you leave me alone?" Outwardly calm, he was persecuted by a demon of unrest within. He agreed to Vaughan's proposals. He expressed no surprise that they had taken rooms at Delardges. He did not see Corris again that night. The next morning Ceinwyn adopted her spoilt-baby manner, and implored him to go shopping with her. At any rate, it got rid of some of the hours that bored him. Perhaps, if he was generous, Gareth reflected, she would be in all the greater hurry to get back to Maes y Groes to show off her new clothes. It was a wearisome morning; but to Ceinwyn it was a glorious experience. Gareth urged her to buy furs, jewels, model gowns and hats; he showered gifts upon her. They arrived back at the hotel shortly before half-past one. One of Corris's pale mauve envelopes was lying on the luncheon-table. Gareth picked it up, and Ceinwyn watched his changing colour.

"Anybody would think you were reading a love-letter," she cried. He hardly heard her; he was upset by the contents of the note, for at all costs he did not wish to lose sight of Corris, not until he knew more about the donor of that diamond armlet. . . .

"Let me see what she has written," Ceinwyn cried. She jumped up and tore the letter out of Gareth's hand, and read the words which mocked her.

> "BELOVED,—I am going away out of your life for ever. And yet I know you have no love for that girl who came into my room as your fiancée. You are dear to me, dear to me, as you know, because of your likeness to another. Do not try to see me again. It would only give me pain. God knows I shall miss you, my darling. The only memory that is left of you is a little crust that we shared together at breakfast yesterday.—CORRIS."

"So you were her lover?"

"It's a lie," said Gareth hoarsely. "But it is quite

true what she says! I don't love you. There is only one woman in the wide world whom I love—Mervee Prichard." Gareth paused; and he said gently, as if half ashamed of his passionate outburst: "Ceinwyn, forgive me for the hurt that my words cause you. From a financial point of view there is nothing in the world I will not do for you, but I implore you to give me my freedom!"

She burst into passionate weeping.

"Never, never, never!" she cried vehemently. Vaughan had to place his arm firmly round her to prevent her making a scene. . . .

That afternoon Sir Islwyn received a telegram from Corris.

> "Taking my doctor's advice and leaving London to-day. I am coming straight to Llanina Priory. Motoring with my maid.—CORRIS."

Howel gave a low whistle when he heard the news, and he said, with a grin, to Mervee:

"I wonder if the Archdruid will have his nephew about the place before the week is out!"

The Priory had been prepared for the house-party that was due to arrive in time for the Eisteddfod the following week.

Corris was very silent during her run to Llanina. Most of the time her eyes were closed; but when she reached Capel Curig she became vivacious and interested in the wild beauty of her surroundings. She passed through the romantic Vale of Bwlch y Gwyddyl. And now Corris found some sort of peace for her troubled heart as she gazed upon the sublime scenery that surrounded her. . . . How many sons and daughters of Wales return to the land of their fathers with bruised hearts! How many of them find comfort and solace in the scented glory of the tall hedges, and in the eternal wonders of the rugged hills! Corris drew a long breath

as the great car, like a terrific monster, swept onwards. On the right the mountains in many places were covered with upright lumner rocks. They passed vast lakes and glittering waterfalls. Moelwnnion, the fairies' hill, and Afon Gaseg, the Mare's river. Carnedd Davydd and Carnedd Llewellyn now appeared in sight; upon its summit are the ruins of a *gwlfa* or a watch-place, perchance which once had been the retreat of a chieftain named David, for was it not in this romantic district that David ap Owen Gwynedd reigned in the time of Henry II? And was it not near this place that he was disinherited and slain by Llewellyn ap Jorwerth? They passed the Lake of Ffynnon Ligwy or the Fountain of the Gwy. On and on rushed Corris through her romance-strewn native land, until the sun-kissed sea glowed like burnished gold on the far horizon. And then at last came Llanina, the lighthouse, and the dark turrets of the Priory.

Thus dawned the hour when Corris realised her great desire, albeit her soul was filled with vague regret for the lover who was dead and for the youth who so strangely resembled him.

Sir Islwyn met her in the hall.

"Welcome to the Priory," said he. Mervee came towards her, and Corris kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"I am afraid it will be rather dull for you this evening," Sir Islwyn apologised. "The time was too short to get any of our neighbours together. Even Howel—whom I think you have met—had to go to Cardiff on business."

"I would prefer to be quiet to-night," Corris assured her host.

The evening passed like a dream. Sir Islwyn, ever delighted to show off the historical beauties of the Priory, found in Corris one of the most interested listeners in the world. His mind began to undergo a considerable change with regard to the artistic professions. "Not only is she

an exceedingly beautiful woman," was his inward comment, " but one of the most intelligent persons I have met."

Corris studied the old Gainsboroughs of dead and gone Prichards. She saw the library, the very chair in which night after night Ivor had sat.

The following morning Corris told Sir Islwyn that she wished to call on the Archdruid. " I've had some correspondence with him," she explained. " He is going to help me with a scheme which I have taken very seriously to heart, and his nephew, the squire of Maes y Groes. I suppose you have met him. You know him well? " she asked Mervee.

" Oh, yes, I know him ! " And she remembered what Howel had said, that Gareth would soon be with his uncle again when Corris came to stay at the Priory.

" Won't you come to Carreg Ina with me? " Corris asked.

Sir Islwyn smiled, and said something about " Two's company ! "

Thus it came to pass that Corris went to Carreg Ina alone. Lisi gasped with astonishment when she walked up to the door and asked for the Archdruid. She had frequently seen her photograph in illustrated papers which found their way to the house. Corris wore a fashionable sapphire blue two-piece suit, a chinchilla collar finished off the straight coat which made her look so trim and girlish. A small felt hat of the same shade covered her hair. Around her white throat was the single row of priceless pearls which she always wore. Llio was in his study when Lisi said, in a voice quivering with excitement :

" It is the singer, Corris."

The next minute she was standing before him.

" Well, I've come," she said softly, " to worry you with my scheme."

Llio looked down into the beautiful, appealing features.

" It shall have my whole-hearted support," he assured her. " And I am sure my nephew will help too—the love of Wales burns deep in his heart. He, too, has just returned from London. I will call him ; then he can hear all you have to say. Will you sit down ? "

He went outside the door and called " Gareth ! "

Corris wandered across the room, and suddenly a low exclamation fell from her lips as her eyes rested upon the painting of Morvydd, and then her gaze wandered to the picture that was below—the picture of Gareth.

" Ivor ! " she muttered ; and when the Archdruid returned she was holding desperately on to the back of a chair. Her face was drawn and white. " That woman," she muttered, " who is she ? "

" My sister Morvydd. My sister who was drowned," answered Llio quietly ; " and this is my nephew, Gareth, the young squire of Maes y Groes. The man whom you wish to meet."

Before she could reply somebody came into the room. She knew his step. Had she not waited for the sound of it, yearned for it hour after hour, when she was ill ?

" Ivor, Ivor ! "

" You have come," Gareth cried. " Oh, I'm glad to see you again. I was afraid you had gone out of my life for ever."

She did not look at him ; she kept her gaze riveted to the picture ; now she knew why it was as if some invisible force drove her to Llanina.

" Will you tell me about her ? She was your mother. I saw a photograph of her long ago. A man showed it to me."

Gareth whitened.

" Yes, I know of the man," he whispered. " I have seen his picture in the bracelet on your arm. He ruined my mother, he broke her heart ; that is why she sought her end out there in the sea."

There was a tense pause. Llio had turned aside. He muttered brokenly :

" Oh, God, wilt thou never take this cup of sorrow from my lips? "

" No wonder that you are dear to me," cried Corris to Gareth. Tears were streaming from her eyes, and she held out her arms to him. " Bend down, bend down; let me look into your face. You are Ivor's son. You are Sir Gareth Prichard! "

CHAPTER XXXV

BALM TO THE SOUL

THERE are moments in life that cannot be repeated, ecstatic moments which banish sorrow and heal gaping wounds. The darkness of the soul is illuminated by a light that soothes a wounded heart and creates the old desire to live! To live joyously—that is the secret of earthly happiness. . . . When Llio heard Corris's thrilling words, when he saw her with her arms placed on Gareth's shoulder, she became an angel of mercy, a wonderful being who scattered warmth where chilliness had lingered, who scattered hope where doubt had reigned. . . .

Sir Gareth Prichard!

Gareth tried to calm Corris. " This mental excitement is the result of her illness," he reflected uneasily. " She, too, must have been very fond of my father." A disquieting thought flashed through his brain. What an enigmatical thing was love! Was it possible that one could be tortured twice by this rare passion which possessed greater power to hurt than to heal? He feared the effect of Corris's rash words upon his uncle. " He will believe her," he thought anxiously. " He would give his life to believe that it was all right between my father and mother." He found himself saying, " We met

in London. Corris has been very ill. She must rest here with us." . . . He smiled down upon her as if she were a child. "Lisi, our old maid, is a wonderful nurse. If you stay here you will become quite strong, and your voice——"

Corris gazed wonderingly into the troubled young face, and the idea flashed through her mind, "What would Ivor have thought of his son?"

"If you have been ill," said Llio heavily, for a sense of depression came over him at Gareth's words, "I am sure you will find that no place on earth has such magic powers as Carreg Ina."

Corris's hands dropped from Gareth's shoulders, and she glanced at him from beneath her long black lashes in the old, artless, challenging manner, which she had always found so successful with men. "My dear," she cried passionately, "you don't believe me!"

"Please don't worry about it," Gareth implored her. "It is a subject which is closed, a subject that is very distressing to my uncle here. We keep it even as a closed book."

"But it cannot remain closed," Corris answered gravely. "When I met Howel Gwine in London I told him my story, the true reason why I wished to come to Llanina."

"You told him?" Gareth repeated vacantly. "What did you tell him?" All thought of the personal advantage that might be coming to himself was overshadowed by the deadly fear of bringing more sorrow and distress to Mervee.

"The truth," said Corris. "Sir Islwyn must know it too. Oh," she went on passionately, with her eyes fixed on the painting of Morvydd, "if there is a vestige of truth in the fact that the dead can control our lives, I am convinced that some hidden power sent me here. I believe that woman wants happiness for her son, just as sincerely, just as ardently, as if she were standing in this room now."

Llio took Corris's hand.

"Come, come," said he, "you must not worry yourself. Maybe all you say is right. We have absolute proof now with regard to the parentage of my nephew." His voice trembled. "As for my sister—well, well, her heart was broken. But, as Gareth here says, it is a closed book. When Morvydd found that her marriage was not legal she ended her life."

"Oh, no, not that!" Corris cried. "That I am a sinner, I know, but do not let me feel that I am also a murderess!"

"Uncle, stop her," Gareth exclaimed helplessly; "she has been so ill. Don't you see the fever is upon her again? She doesn't know what she is saying. Corris, my dear——"

"I must tell you everything," she panted. "I must tell the truth or die. Will you listen?" She turned her face towards Llio. "You are a preacher. When you were in America, years ago, I was there too. I did not go to your meetings; I was just winning my laurels. I heard of your lectures, and of your revival meetings, that how by the magic of your words people stood up and proclaimed their faith in the salvation of their God!"

Gareth walked away; he could not bear to look upon the mental suffering of this woman.

"If there was a revival meeting now," Corris went on, "you would find me on the penitent form. I know the misery of sin. I lied to Ivor; I lied because I loved him. I lied because I wanted to keep him; but I lost him irrevocably!" She sank down upon a chair and covered her face with her hands, and for a time the silence of the room was disturbed by her sobs.

"Oh, I can't bear it," Gareth said brokenly. "She is only distressing herself, you, and me."

Corris struggled to regain her composure.

"You must listen," she declared. "I am not going to bear the burden alone another day. Do you believe

that I am merely gratifying a foolish whim? I married when I was little more than a child." She rested her elbow on the arm of the chair and her chin on her hand. "Years later I believed my husband to be dead. I married Sir Ivor Prichard."

"Then you are Lady Prichard?"

"No." Corris shook her head, and then she went on with the story which she had told to Howel. . . .

Llio paced the floor slowly up and down, as if he were a sentry on duty. His hands were tightly locked together behind his back.

"This long-drawn-out tale!" he thought miserably. It revealed the burning agony of a soul in torment. "The fires of hell," he reflected in his old whimsical way, "are only those we create ourselves by our own wrong-doing, and this woman. . . ."

"Oh, you are losing interest in what I am telling you!" Corris cried reproachfully.

"I am listening," said Llio.

"One day I made a discovery," Corris continued, taking up the thread of her story. She told them of the struggle between herself and Ivor Prichard. How he wished her to sacrifice her career and live quietly with him at Llanina Priory. How that at the moment she believed that the dead-sea fruit of success was more necessary to her happiness than was the love of man.

Llio and Gareth, now intensely fascinated, heard the tragedy of her illegal marriage to Ivor Prichard. "I wrote straight away to Llanina and told him the truth. I thought," she went on brokenly, "that he would pity me, and offer to help me to get rid of Lavalle, who destroyed my youth. But his letter in answer to mine was the greatest disillusionment of all. He had married another woman. He enclosed her photograph. It was the photograph of that woman," said Corris. "And written across it was the one word 'Morvydd.' I tore it into a hundred pieces and threw it into the fire. Then

if ever a devil possessed a woman, a devil indeed entered into me, the devil of jealousy, of hate. I cabled that my former communication was false, that it was only sent as a test to know how much I meant to him. Some months later I left New York, and I met Ivor in London. He told me of his marriage to Morvydd, that he could not stand a scandal . . . that he had a son; and he offered me money to keep silent. I refused it. . . . I loved him. . . ."

"My poor woman"—Llio gently placed his hand upon her shoulder—"rest now."

She turned to Gareth. "My jealousy kept you out of your birthright all these years. You will hate me now! But, believe me, I have never known the meaning of peace since the hour I heard of Ivor's death. Whatever sin I committed, God knows I paid the price." She lifted her head, and, stretching out her hands dramatically, she cried, "Oh, will you not give balm to my soul? Can you not forgive me?"

"Who are we to withhold forgiveness?" Llio answered gravely.

"But this story must remain a secret between the three of us here," Gareth declared.

"What do you mean?" Llio asked. "Who are you to say that the fair name of Morvydd is not to be vindicated throughout the length and breadth of the land?"

"But what of the living? Sir Islwyn is an old man, and Mervee—Mervee shall not suffer any more. Oh, uncle, tell her—tell her that I love Mervee!"

"But Ceinwyn Rees?" Corris asked.

"What is the use of discussing my hateful business?" said Gareth impatiently. "My mother left a letter behind her. Of course, she did not know she was Sir Ivor's wife. Before I was twenty-one Mervee——"

"Yes, Sir Islwyn's daughter," said Corris.

"We met and loved, but I had to give her up because of what my mother wrote." . . . He quoted those words

which had been seared into his heart for all time: " ' If I return not to Carreg Ina and my body is found in the bosom of the sea, curse him who destroyed me and those who bear his name for ever. If I come not back, remember always that Sir Ivor Prichard was the man who sent me to my doom. . . .' "

" I am a most miserable woman," cried Corris. " So you drove Mervee Prichard out of your life and tried to fill her place with Ceinwyn Rees. Oh, now I know indeed why I was forced to this place. It was not Ivor who destroyed your mother, it was I. . . ."

They could not pacify her, Gareth and Llio. They tried to soothe her, to assure her that Morvydd was the last person in the world who would bear resentment to one who had suffered so deeply as she had done.

She caught Gareth by the arm.

" But no peace can come to me with all the repentance in the world, with all the sackcloth and ashes in which I might enshroud myself, if you wreck your life as Morvydd did, as I did, and Ivor too. Don't you understand," she went on wildly, " we have all paid the great price that you might find happiness? You must force Ceinwyn Rees to set you free."

" I have asked her; she has refused," Gareth answered in a low voice. " Why, then, should I give her the joy of becoming Lady Prichard of Llanina, humiliating Mervee still further? "

" A way must be found," cried Corris.

" Sir Islwyn shall never know the truth, not in his lifetime," Gareth persisted stubbornly.

Corris would not listen to him.

" I have been haunted by visions of Ivor. Can you forgive me? " she faltered.

" As we ask God to forgive us," Llio answered gravely.

" But even so," Corris sighed, " even with all your promises, I cannot rest until the wrong is righted. Will

you do something for me? At least I may ask one favour," she implored. "Will you see Mervee, will you tell her yourself what you know of the wishes of the dead that parted you, and of the living, who can reunite you? How can a Prichard be parted from a Prichard?"

"It is torture for us both, for Mervee and I to meet," said Gareth. "At Sir Islwyn's death, then I may speak."

"Let Mervee choose," said Llio brokenly. "Gareth boy, I ask this of you!"

"Help me to the way of peace, Gareth," urged Corris, "for Ivor's sake!" She clasped her hands appealingly before her, using all the unconscious artifice that was so inbred in her that it was difficult indeed to say where artifice left off and sincerity began. "Let me ask Mervee to see you. I beg this of you!"

"Very well, she shall decide," said Gareth after a long pause. He went to the writing-desk and wrote a note.

"MERVEE,—I must write to you. I must write to you because if I don't I will grow crazy. I want to see you, to converse with you, to hold you, to look into your eyes and say all manner of strange things to you. Do come to the tower to-night.

"Earnestly, lovingly,

"GARETH."

He folded his letter and handed it to Corris. She was very tired; her features were drawn and haggard. She glanced in the mirror.

"Oh, dear," she cried. "They must not see me like this!" She withdrew a piece of silk and swansdown from her jewelled vanity-bag and powdered her face. "I shall never rest," she declared to Gareth, "until you and Mervee Prichard are one!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

MOONLIGHT MADNESS

When Corris was motoring back to the Priory she saw a man walking slowly along the road as if lost in thought, and she immediately recognised Howel.

"Can I give you a lift?" she called out.

"Just what I wanted," he exclaimed. "I heard you had arrived. A thousand welcomes to your native soil, fair lady!"

"That's very nice of you!"

"Are you going to prosecute your enquiries with regard to the missing heir of Llanina?" Howel asked. Something in his manner warned Corris to be guarded in her reply. She became as cautious as she had once been indiscreet, when she had placed her life-story before a man of Howel's calibre.

"Possibly."

"Well, you can hardly expect me to wish you luck," he grinned; and he added, "All the same, you'd do an awfully decent thing for me if you would influence Mervee in my favour." There was a hunted look about Howel that Corris did not remember having noticed in London. It gave her a feeling of distrust. He looked reckless, dissipated.

"Forgive me if I am too frank," said Corris gently, "but you look as if you are burning the candle at both ends. As a woman of the world, do you think, even supposing I had the power to influence Miss Prichard in the way that you suggest, that I would persuade her to marry you?"

Howel gave a short laugh.

"Your opinion of me, then, is not altogether flattering. It has changed since I was in London. You really"—he hesitated for a moment—"well, it's a difficult thing to say; but, to put it bluntly, I did not think then

that my presence was altogether distasteful to you."

Corris betrayed her annoyance by her rising colour.

"You came from Llanina—you knew the Priory."

"Do you seriously believe I am going to help you to displace my old friends, the Prichards?"

"For certain considerations," Corris retorted, "I believe you would do anything."

"All the same," Howel exclaimed, "you cannot blame me if I place your story before Sir Islwyn. After all, he is more or less housing a spy."

Corris became very pale, and yet in her heart she knew that there was some small vestige of truth in what he said.

"You don't seem very anxious to answer my question," Howel remarked. "Perhaps neither of us is free from blame; and God knows I don't want to quarrel with anyone just now. My father's health is failing. He doesn't even take an interest in billiards. . . . It is only with the greatest difficulty that he gets through the services on Sunday."

"You have your worries, no doubt," Corris answered sympathetically.

"Anyway, you agree there's not much to be gained by a quarrel," said Howel. "I'm damned fond of Mervee. She's just the sort of girl to help a man to keep straight. Besides, we've heaps of things in common. She's fond of horses, and so am I—tremendously fond of them. If she'd marry me I'd be a different man. I swear I'd turn over a new leaf."

"A little hard, is it not?" interposed Corris quietly, "that a girl has to marry a man, not because she wants someone to protect her and to cherish her, but because she is expected to help him to keep straight?"

"I suppose she's been confiding to you her romantic attachment for Elys," Howel exclaimed, with a sharp glance at her.

"You are wrong," she replied sweetly; and by this time the Priory was reached. Corris went straight up

to her room, and Howel went off to find Sir Islwyn. The latter was seated in his favourite chair reading the day's paper.

"Ah, there you are, Howel," Sir Islwyn exclaimed. "Got through your business all right at Cardiff?"

Howel changed colour slightly. "Yes, sir."

He had had a difficult time at Cardiff. He had sought to send a warning, to divert a small boat that was due to arrive at Llanina after the arrival of a certain vessel from overseas. . . .

Sir Islwyn might have known what was passing in his mind when he said carelessly: "They tell me, those coastguard fellows, that they expect to make a big coup with regard to the smuggling business around these parts. I thought that the whole thing had died down, but, as a matter of fact, this is not the case."

Howel's mouth grew dry and cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

"I hear, sir," he commenced, clearing his throat and trying to change the subject, "Miss Ceinwyn Rees is coming over here one day soon to see the stables. She shall try the bay mare. That's the horse that should suit her."

"Just as you like," said Sir Islwyn, who was nothing if not hospitable. "But don't let her go away without having luncheon, or something of that sort. By the way, your friend Corris has arrived, one of the most charming and beautiful women whom I have ever met."

"Dangerous, sir!"

Sir Islwyn laughed.

"Is that supposed to be a warning for me? My dear fellow, find me the woman who isn't dangerous. We are captivated almost before we know what has happened."

"Well, you should know, sir. I mean, of course——"

At this both men laughed, and so the tension was relieved.

Luncheon was a quiet meal. At Sir Islwyn's request Howel made one of the party, and the Pennants motored

over. Both Dilys and her brother were anxious to show Corris some of the beauty-spots of the county, for a true Welshman is never tired of showing off the glories of his country to any new-comer to old Wales. Lady Mari Wynne arrived before dinner, also Colonel Lloyd, of a Ghurka regiment, Major Conrad of the Woods and Forests Department, and Heseltine, who had been a British resident at a native Court when Sir Islwyn was in India. Surreptitiously Corris had managed to slip Gareth's note into Mervee's hand; the latter read it when she was alone. At first she struggled with herself. Should she go, or should she not go? Gareth had treated her badly; he belonged to another. The day of his wedding was drawing near; it was to take place soon after the Eisteddfod; the ceremony was to be performed at Maes y Groes. Oh, yes, all this Mervee had read in the local papers, for Gwyn Vaughan had the greatest belief in the word "publicity."

After dinner that night Sir Islwyn retired with his Anglo-Indian friends to have what he called "a great buck," which meant they would tell yarns and discuss situations past, present, and future of their life in India until the small hours of the morning. Corris, knowing that Mervee was to settle a momentous proposition with Gareth that night, suggested music to Lady Mari Wynne. Howel hung about, dull and morose. His father was also a guest at the Priory; enfeebled and irritable, he joined his host in the library.

"Come along," smiled Corris to Howel in that artless manner which did not bear a vestige of resentment after their rather warm discussion of the morning. Howel was gratified. "She wants to help me, after all," he thought, for of course he never imagined for a single moment that Mervee would not be one of the party in the drawing-room. Lady Mari Wynne was enchanted with the Abbey, with Sir Islwyn, and more than all with his daughter.

"Wonderful luck for Howel," she reflected, "to

marry such a dear girl and to live here with their children."

Her reverie was broken into by Corris. She sat down at the piano, and her hands swept over the keys in the prelude to "All Through the Night." It was years since she had sung it. It brought all kinds of memories back to her. Her voice held her hearers spellbound, just as this modern Circe intended it should do. Mervee slipped out of the room when Howel was standing broodingly by Corris's side. His elbow rested on the top of the piano; his face was gloomy, troubled. . . .

Mervee drew a white Chinese fringed shawl around her. It was embroidered with roses, their gay foliage trailing hither and thither on the ivory surface. Her silky hair fluttered around her little oval face; the moon turned night into day; long shadows from the hedges patterned the roadway. With a riotous beating heart she crossed the undulating moors, shapely and beautiful like a woman's bosom. The waves made soft music as they broke upon the beach. Tracts of brown seaweed were washed up from the dark blue waters and swept back again into the great ocean, like dark sins washed away from the human soul by the sacrifice of God for man. . . .

Gareth was waiting, unable to conceal his impatience. He walked backwards and forwards within the narrow limits of the tower. Once his foot caught against what he thought was an old coil of wire; it had been covered by bracken; but so deeply was his mind engrossed with the happenings of the day that that which would have intrigued him on another occasion did not affect him one way or the other now, so the wire remained where it was. At last the sound of her step, and then, oh! she was in his arms just like she used to be ages ago in the beginning of time, when as twin souls they had met and revelled in the blissful hour of perfect love. His kisses burnt her with their passion; they thrilled her with their ecstasy. He held her as if he could never let her go again

even though all the world sought to part these souls who were so dear to one another.

"Mervee—Mervee!" Gareth's voice shook with emotion.

Her eyes were filled with tears, wonderful tears, the rarest and most divine in all the wide world, tears that spring from the sacred fountain of love. . . . And then came the bitterness, that cruel stab of conscience, and Mervee sought to break away from those arms that led to the Enchanted Gateway of Love.

"Oh, but it is wrong, Cariad," she cried. "What shall we do, you and I? There is Ceinwyn Rees, and your marriage. The papers are full of it."

"I begged her to give me my freedom," Gareth cried hoarsely. "Oh, my dear, I implored her." He caught her hand within his own, and held it so tightly that she could have cried out aloud at the bitter sweet pain.

"And she?"

Mervee's question was a whisper.

"She refused; but I cannot go on. If I marry her I shall not be true to her—my soul is yours. Take me, good or bad—I want you."

"But why did you let me go?"

"Why did I let you go?" Gareth was half dazed when he asked the question, for in the bliss of that intimate meeting, he had forgotten for a moment the reason he had sent for her.

"Let us sit in the shadow of the wall," he begged her, "and then you shall hear a strange story." She sank on the soft bracken by his side, and he put his arm around her.

"Here in this very tower long ago," said he, "a great love-drama took place, just as big a love-drama as the one that exists between you and I. Have you never wondered about my father?"

"I did not care about your people. It did not matter the least little bit in the world," she went on, rubbing her warm cheek against his as if to emphasise her words.

"It was enough for me," she added softly, "that you were you!"

He drew her closer to him.

"Suppose if my father was not married to my mother?"

"Could you have been less my lover?"

"Oh, Mervee, it was the dead who parted us."

"The dead?"

"My mother," Gareth explained. He told her about Morvydd, but he kept back the name of her betrayer during the unfolding of the tale. Together they looked upon the sands in the moonlight, the pathway down which Morvydd had passed to her cruel fate. Beyond were the moors over which her lover had galloped. Mervee shivered. Long ago she had been told by an old gipsy that on a certain night in the year across the moor came the sound of the thud of a horse's hoofs.

"And have I not seen a horseman ride down the cliff," the gipsy went on, "and disappear into the sea—a ghostie, a real ghostie? He was one of your ancestors," the gipsy had declared. "Hap on a day you will meet his son. Then will his spirit rest in peace."

This wild prophecy Mervee remembered now. How foolish it was, and yet . . .

"Her lover tried to save her, but he lost his life out there. It was as if the old moon turned their heads, as if they were stricken with moonlight madness—my father——"

"Your father?"

Gareth was now holding Mervee so close against his body that she could feel his heart-beats. "He deserted my mother. He drove her to her death."

He told her of Morvydd's last pitiless words. "Oh, Mervee," he cried brokenly, "she could not have known the suffering she was going to inflict upon her son!"

After a long time Mervee spoke.

"She understands things better now." She stroked Gareth's quivering features with her hand to comfort

him. She pressed her lips on his; she lay in his arms drugged with love.

"Corris came to Carreg Ina yesterday."

"Yes, I know." Mervee suddenly chilled.

She couldn't understand why he wished to bring the famous singer's name into the conversation at such a moment.

"Corris——"

"Oh, why talk of Corris now?"

"She knew my father," Gareth persisted. "She went through a form of marriage with him; but when he thought he was free he married someone else. Later he found this marriage was illegal, for Corris had lied to him, and so his son by his second wife was nameless!"

"Oh, why torture yourself?" cried Mervee passionately. "What does it matter to me if you are nameless?"

"But I have told you, my mother could not forgive. She lost her life. . . . Corris has confessed the truth."

"And you trusted her with a letter to me?"

"Yes, I trusted her," said Gareth. "She wants us to be happy, you and I. She lied to the man she loved. Her marriage to him was illegal—his marriage to my mother legal. I bear my father's name, after all. He left Maes y Groes to me. He was Sir Ivor Prichard——"

"Then you"—Mervee passed her hands across her eyes—"you are Sir Gareth Prichard, of Llanina. My father is not the baronet?"

"That's just it, pet lamb," said Gareth. "I did not wish to tell a soul, but Corris insisted that I should speak. I want you to help me."

There was a terrible silence.

What could Mervee say? She stood, as it were, between two fires. The thought of Ceinwyn at the Priory was unbearable to her, for the property was entailed as it had been for centuries upon the baronets of Llanina. . . .

"Oh, Gareth," she cried brokenly, "there is only one thing for you to do. My father must know; but wait

until his house-party for the Eisteddfod has broken up."

"I will never let you go," Gareth declared. And in their misery they clung to one another until the midnight stars grew pale in the sky. . . .

When Howel discovered that Mervee had left the room he became suspicious. He surreptitiously made his way to the tower. . .

Two days later Ceinwyn received the most despicable thing in all the world, an anonymous letter :

> "Your lover is faithless to you. Watch his movements in the tower of Llanina. There he meets his true love every night.—A WELL-WISHER."

Ceinwyn went nearly mad with anger when she read these lines. She showed them to her uncle, and he used his old argument :

"Keep quiet until after the wedding. Then you'll be in a better position to put the thumbscrew on."

But when did a woman of Ceinwyn's temperament know the meaning of the word discretion? She went over to Llanina the following day, straight to Carreg Ina, and she found Gareth. Llio left them alone together ; and once again the study at the preacher's house became the scene of a drama—perhaps the most poignant of all.

"Why are you treating me so badly?" she cried. "I hear you are carrying on with another girl. Is it true?"

Gareth did not speak for a moment or two. He tried to choose his words.

"My dear," he said at last, "you know I have never loved you. I never pretended to do so. We just glided into this miserable affair. You are young, Ceinwyn. There will be a real lover for you one day. I am only the ghost of one!"

"I'll never set you free. Never!" she cried. "Once I wanted you for what you've got," she said shamelessly, "but now I want you for yourself!"

"A union without love is hell. Such a marriage is bondage—it is cruel."

"You must come over to Maes y Groes—you must tell my uncle what you've told me." Ceinwyn persisted. "Once I get him to Hengwrt, I will never let him go back," she thought.

Gareth tried to calm her.

"I certainly will come," he promised.

On her way back to Maes y Groes Ceinwyn decided: "It is that Prichard girl." Her face grew dark with passion. "I will watch. I'll watch them at the Eisteddfod. I'll surprise them when they are alone together. I'll go to the tower and wait. I'll shame them. I'll part them even though it kills me to do so."

CHAPTER XXXVII

MORVYDD'S BLESSING

On the day of the Eisteddfod Sir Islwyn and his guests motored over to Tyglyn. The roads were thronged with every sort of conveyance, whilst crowds of enthusiasts made their way on foot to the scene of this great national meeting. Gareth and his uncle stayed at the Ivy Bush Hotel; he had taken a private sitting-room there. He had not seen Mervee since their meeting at the octagon tower.

The Eisteddfod opened with a meeting of the Gorsedd. It was held early in the morning, with all its picturesque ceremonial, in the grounds of a castle that was historically one of the most interesting fortresses in the Principality, built centuries ago by Edward to keep down the spirit and daring of the turbulent Welsh. Llio was a striking figure in his snow-white robes, the robes of the Archdruid of Wales. He wore a breastplate of gold, and a crown

of gold oak-leaves rested upon his white hair. He entered the sacred circle with his Court, and he stood on the great Logan Stone. The trumpeter blew his horn at each of the four cardinal points, which symbolises the summoning of the Bardic Brotherhood from all parts of the kingdom, and the Gorsedd prayer was made: "*Dyro Dduw dy Nawdd,*" which is in English: "Grant, O God, thy refuge." The poetical lines of the prayer followed:

> And in refuge strength,
> And in strength understanding,
> And in understanding knowledge,
> And in knowledge a perception of rectitude,
> And in the perception of rectitude the love of it,
> And in that love the love of all existences,
> And in the love of all existences the Love of God,
> God and all goodness.

The sight thrilled Corris, thrilled Gareth and Mervee. It touched Ceinwyn, who lingered like a thief—a thief of love—far away in the vast crowd. The faces of the people were enshrouded into a sort of rapt spirituality. The druids' robes were uniformly white. The chief bard, no matter which of the three grades he may belong to, has a distinctive colour, suitable to his own order. If a poet is also a chief bard he wears a robe of sky-blue colour, representing the symbol of truth. The druids' robes are white. An ovate's robe is green, which signifies the development of science and learning. Sir Islwyn's old friends found the Gorsedd regalia not less interesting than the ancient ceremony. The Gorsedd standard, a mystic symbol representing the "unutterable Name"; the great, double-headed Gorsedd sword used to proclaim peace at the Gorsedd ceremony; the Hulas Horn, that is borne in the procession, and which rested on the Logan Stone.

The only person missing from the Priory party that day was Howel. He had made excuses to Lady Mari when she asked him to accompany the party. She was

annoyed. Watching Mervee closely, she realised that she was unhappy, although she sought to hide her state of mind from her father's guests.

Once Gareth had managed to get near to her for a moment.

"Oh, Gareth, doesn't Llio look splendid in his robes!" Mervee cried, and Gareth pressed her hand. . . . The crowds surged between them and separated them. Ceinwyn, in the rôle which she adopted as a spy, saw them, saw the secret they could not hide, read in the brightness that lit up their features their passion for one another. . . .

"At night they meet in the tower." The words burnt themselves into her brain.

The Eisteddfod was over. The next day Sir Islwyn's guests were leaving; they were enthusiastic over its success.

One evening Ceinwyn told Gwyn Vaughan that she was going again to seek Gareth at Carreg Ina.

Her uncle shook his head.

"I have warned you," said he. "Don't force his hand too much. You will regret it, girl fach, if you do."

But Ceinwyn was beyond the stage when a jealous girl listens to reason. She had decided to go to the tower that night. She would wait and watch. . . .

She left her car in the town. Climbing the cliff at dusk she entered the tower. She was in a state of terrific excitement. To-night she was going to show her strength.

Howel was also watching the tower, watching it with a gold hunter open in his hand. He would teach the coastguards to hide in the shelter of the octagon tower! At any rate, that point of vantage should be lost to them. It should never shelter burning love again. It should be blotted off the face of the earth before that little black boat crept into the bay at the end of the week.

Suddenly his blood seemed to freeze within his veins. He saw a girl making her way up the path. God! and

he had chosen an hour for the consummation of his scheme when everybody would be out of the way. For at this hour, he reflected bitterly, it was too early for the surreptitious meetings of Mervee and her lover.

He jumped up and called out a warning to the girl.

"Don't go there; it's dangerous!"

But she did not hear him, and, with a groan of fear, he tore after her. He reached the tower, and he cried hoarsely:

"Ceinwyn Rees, what are you doing here? This place is dangerous. A mine has been laid. The fuse——"

"Don't be silly," cried Ceinwyn. "I suppose you are in league with Gareth. You want to part me from him; but you won't succeed."

He dashed over the bracken and caught her wildly.

"Come, come, for the love of God. You'll be killed!"

A dull roar, a burst of flame—Ceinwyn and Howel and the octagon tower were blown to the winds of heaven. . . .

It was a week later that a letter came to Carreg Ina. The envelope was addressed in Islwyn Prichard's characteristic handwriting to "Sir Gareth Prichard, Bart."

"Well, indeed, boy bach," Lisi cried to Gareth, "somebody is trying to have a little first-of-April joke with you for sure."

Gareth made no reply. He was haggard from sleeplessness. Everybody in the district had been shocked by the terrible fate that had befallen Ceinwyn and Howel. On the day of their funeral the countryside was black with mourners.

Gareth went into Llio's study, and he placed the letter before him.

"He knows," said he. "Corris has told him. I will go to the Priory."

Llio placed his hands upon his nephew's shoulders, and he said in a low, earnest voice:

" May the blessing of God rest upon you—rest upon you all."

Gareth met Mervee in the grounds on the way to the Priory, and what he said to her cannot be written by man or woman, even though they possessed the magic of Merlin, the magician of old Wales. Who can describe the tenderness of reciprocated love—the mystic and perfect union of two happy souls? Sweet were the words that passed between them. They built their glorious castles in the air. They planned their radiant future. How they would restore the ancient glories of Pant y Cariad, and how that Islwyn Prichard should remain in possession of Llanina's historic Priory. Did Morvydd know of the joy that had come to her son? Was it only imagination that made Gareth turn sharply round and scan the dark trees? Was it fairy music, or the breeze playing in the leafy glade?

" Oh, Mervee," cried Gareth, " I thought I heard my mother's voice singing her own lullaby." He hummed the tune. He found himself singing the very words that she had created in love and pride of him.

> " At the gateway of my heart, love,
> In the shadow of my soul. . . ."

And, nestling against him, Mervee's eyes filled with tears, as she whispered:

" Morvydd's blessing."

THE END

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